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MARY NORTH

A NOVEL

BY

LUCY RIDER MEYER

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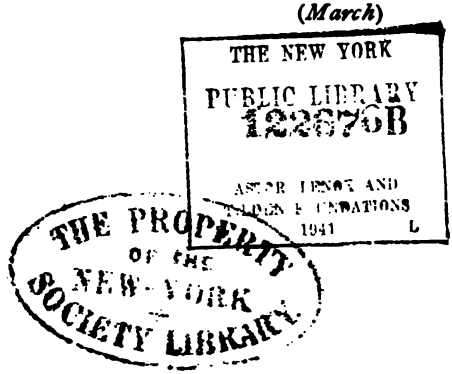

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F

TO

MY SEVEREST CRITIC

MY DEAREST COMRADE

S. R. M.

MARY NORTH

CHAPTER I

SHE'S A GIRL

"Hello, Miss Stuck-up!"

A rough looking lad of eleven or twelve flung out the epithet at the modest back of a little girl who was walking decorously along a snowy New England road. It was March. The sun was shining brilliantly. The snow was melting in the breath of a south wind and little pools of slushy water lay in the road bed. The child, Mary North, was returning from an errand on which her mother had sent her. She had been walking happily along, sometimes hopping about for pure joy as lambs do in the sunny spring She wore a knitted hood, faded a little, and a cloak of dark blue flannel, home-made as anyone could see.

Suddenly, at a turn of the road, she came face to face with Fred Griggs, the terror of her school life. With him was a strange young man, well dressed and pleasing enough to look at; but Mary gave him one glance and instantly pronounced him a hundred times more insufferable than Fred himself. She drew herself up with an unconscious lift of her well-poised little head, and they passed without a word. The next moment, however, the younger boy, with a sudden turn, hurled at her the stinging taunt:

"Hello, Miss Stuck-up!"

Mary turned, facing them. Her face flushed at the unprovoked attack, but she did not reply.

"Yah! Yah!" yelled the young ruffian. "She ain't no stuck-up, *she* ain't! An' she ain't got no temper, oh, no! She's a nice, soft, little pussy-cat!"

"I'm not a pussy-cat!" screamed the child, shrilly.

For a minute there was a war of words between the two, the young man standing by in an unpleasant kind of silence. Fred accused—poor Mary could only deny. She was not versed in the language of abuse.

Suddenly the young man spoke. He did not yell like Fred, but the ridicule in his voice cut the deeper into the child's sensitive soul.

"She's a girl!"

Mary was struck dumb. That was an accusation she could not deny.

The young fellow burst into a loud laugh, at which the child half turned as if to flee. But she did not. She stood trembling and panting, her face red with rage, her eyes full of tears.

The young man stretched out his hand, with pantomime pattings, as though propitiating an explosive puppy.

"Nice little girl!" said he. "Come here and kiss me! Nice little girl! She won't bite!"

This was too much. Stooping suddenly, Mary dashed up a handful of the wet snow and flung it furiously in her tormentor's face. It surprised and blinded him. Before he realized what she was doing another came, then another, the third finding its way into the right ear of the younger boy. Wet snow is demoralizing. Both boys turned and ran, and it

looked as if the little girl had routed her assailants. But not so. They rallied and came on, soon pushing the battle hard. Boys can throw snowballs better than girls, and one of these boys was nearly twice the size of the enraged midget they were tormenting. Mary dodged dexterously and fought furiously, but her face was soon battered crimson; and she was panting violently and exerting the last remnants of her childish strength while her enemies were still nearly fresh.

And now a new danger threatened. At the side of the road just back of her was a big pool of slushy water, edged by a sharp little bluff of snow. Toward this the boys were slowly driving her, as blinded, harassed, choking, she backed away from them. Three steps more and she would go over. Fred mingled his missiles with screams of malicious merriment. The bigger boy's work was quiet but deadly.

At this crisis the exhausted girl heard just at her ear a clear ringing "Hello!" A light sleigh had driven up unnoticed, and a young man in a big fur overcoat was leaning out and stretching forth a hand. The little figure swayed instinctively toward it, and the next instant was lifted safe into the welcome refuge.

"Shame on you big fellows to abuse a little girl!" cried the indignant voice of the stranger.

"She began it, anyway!" yelled Fred, as the sleigh drove rapidly away.

The boys turned and walked on, the older one nursing his cold fingers.

"You city folks can't stan' cold worth a cent," remarked Fred, wiping his nose with the back of his hand. It was a peculiar organ that needed the wiping, almost flat and ridiculously small.

"Oh, shut up!" retorted the other viciously. He tucked his handkerchief inside his wet collar.

Fred kept a prudent silence.

"Never mind, I'll get even with her yet—see if I don't," continued the other.

"Why, I thought you was going back to Boston to-night?"

"I am. But—you just wait. I'll get even with her, I say. Billy Sloan can wait, but he never forgets."

The boy at his side was much impressed. The boastful voice suggested pistols and poison to him. He remembered it long after it had passed quite out of the mind of the other, to whom, indeed, it was simply one of many mouthfuls of vain air.

"I wish I could go to Boston with you," said Fred longingly. "The old man says he don't care how soon I git out."

"You can't come to Boston without any money. You save up a little, say twenty dollars, and I'll take you any time and help you cut your eye teeth."

On the other road Mary and her deliverer were riding toward the village. The child had dropped down into the robes at the bottom of the sleigh. Her face and little bare hands were purple, but there was an ominous whiteness around the lips, and she shook like a person in ague. She was trying very hard not to cry. Her feet were soaked, and she was wet to the skin about the arms and neck.

"You poor little thing!" said her rescuer, looking pityingly at her. "Come here. My coat is big enough for you and me too."

He opened his big hospitable overcoat, and, lifting

the child to his knee, drew the big overlapping sides about her. She snuggled down into the warmth.

"There," said he. "You catch hold of the sides and hold them together. It won't button with two of us inside. So! Does that suit you?"

She rippled out a little laugh, happy, but a bit hysterical.

"Are you hurt?"

"No." She could not talk much yet.

"Were you going to your home?"

She nodded.

"It's in the village, I suppose? Well, I'm going there and I'll take you right to your mother."

He drove on around the corner. The spire of the white church came in sight. The little form in his arms stopped quivering, and pretty soon Mary was able to tell him where her home was. Then he drew her on to talk of her errand, her school and the things that usually lie uppermost in a child's mind. During the slow drive of a mile to the village they became very well acquainted.

"Here we are at last," said he, cheerily, as he drew up in front of Mrs. North's door. "Now run in, little one, and get on dry clothes or you'll catch your death o' cold."

Mary disentangled herself slowly from the warm little nest. Then she stood up before her deliverer.

"Thank you ever and ever so much," she said. "I guess I should have been killed if you hadn't come, and then those boys would have been hung." She looked for a moment as if she didn't know, under the circumstances, whether she was sorry or glad for her rescue.

"But I didn't begin it. I never said a word till they called me names. They called me dreadful names. They called me—a girl!"

The grieved under lip quivered, and the big eyes filled with tears.

"I knew it, little one—I knew you were not to blame. There! Run in now and get dry."

Still she hesitated. Suddenly she burst out crying, and, with a sudden grateful impulse, flung her arms around his neck and kissed him again and again. Then she jumped out of the sleigh and ran into the house without looking around.

When Stephen Bayard shook out his sleighing robes that night in the barn of his uncle, Dr. Sheldon, there fell to the floor a faded little blue mitten, soaking wet and not over clean. He picked it up amusedly and thrust his long forefinger into it. It went quite through a hole in the end.

"Poor little midget!" he said, "they called her a girl!"

He laughed a little. Then, with a quick, shame-faced glance about, he put the mitten into his pocket.

CHAPTER II

IN THE HOME NEST

Mary North was the only child of her mother, and she a widow. They lived alone in a little cottage. Herbert North had come with his wife from Boston to Westland, years before. He was a Harvard graduate and had been called by the village fathers to organize the High School needed in the slowly growing town. Neither of the newcomers was young, though the wife was a bride. The schoolmaster was overflowing with energy, and his wife was gentle and neighborly, though her bearing spoke unconsciously of good birth and delicate breeding. She was frail in health and there were lines of suffering about her sensitive mouth.

"Come of high steppin' stock, but she's seen trouble," said the keen-eyed neighbors, shaking their heads.

Herbert North's school work was immediately successful and the respect and affection of the community was easily gained. A small house was bought on a roomy village lot.

But after two years the man died of a swift fever. He left no money—only the house. So a few days after the funeral the widow, calm still, only the delicate lines in her face drawn a little deeper, put out the sign, "Dress-making," and the neighbors came with their gowns to be made. She was skilled in the craft, and by marvels of economy she picked out at the needle's point a support for herself and little Mary.

The child grew up with perfect health. She had her mother's quiet ways, but once aroused there flashed out all of her father's tremendous energy. For lack of child companions she was timid and old-fashioned, but she was never lonely. Her imagination was enormously active, and the beautiful creatures of her fancy trooped about her and peopled for her a fairy world.

On Mary's fifth birthday a friendly customer of her mother's, noticing the quiet child, made her the astonishing present of a large wooden rocking-horse, quite fresh from the shop. It was white, with dashes of gray here and there, and it was caparisoned with a shining black bridle and a dull red saddle. The diabolical disposition of the horse manifested itself very soon after he came into Mary's possession, but he rapidly improved under the terrible discipline she gave him.

Mary rode Prince week in and week out. Little by little his bridle ceased to shine and the red saddle shone instead. One day the right rocker loosened and came off. After the first shock Mary pulled off the other one, and, fastening the horse to a little red cart, made great journeys out into the wide world. Boston and London, and even the Jerusalem she heard her mother read about in the Bible, were often visited by her in the course of a single morning's ride.

At last, one calamitous day, one of the horse's legs split square off—it had been made the wrong way of the wood. The case was beyond the veterinary skill of her mother, so Mary tenderly propped him up with his back against the wall in the hospital of the woodshed. Poor Prince stuck out his one sound front leg straight in front of him in pathetic protest, and Mary went about with red eyes for two days.

When the child was four years old the Air Line Railroad was built through Westland, and the sleepy little town began to wake up. The road ran directly back of Mrs. North's house, close by the garden. The little girl was delighted. The great engines roared out to her a story of power that set her soul a-vibrating. And the pretty cars with their red and green flags or their gleaming lights seemed to be flashing visitors from a fairy world.

Mary slept with her mother in a tidy little bedroom opening off the sitting-room. More than once she had wakened in the night to find her mother lying beside her only half undressed, her hand pressed hard over her heart, her face very white and strange. Sometimes the sufferer sent her for a neighbor, and after a little the doctor always came. But twice when Mary was older she had herself gone for Dr. Sheldon.

At one of the doctor's visits Mary heard him say, frowning over his big, near-sighted eyes, "You ought not to stay alone this way with the child."

But Mrs. North still stayed alone with the child.

Mrs. North was profoundly religious. Mary's small feet began to walk in the ways of orthodoxy with their first totterings. She could not remember when she began to say her "Now I lay me," and every Sunday she walked demurely into church by her mother's side, a model of religious decorum. When she was a little girl she had caraway seeds to eat to keep her awake during the sermon—a prophylactic not always effectual. But she soon outgrew both caraway seeds and naps, and the words of the preacher and the prayers and hymns began to penetrate her heart. It did not take long for her to become thoroughly indoctrinated

with the main facts of Christianity as taught at Westland, and she was not ten years old when she quite understood that all men, even little girls, are sinners; but that Jesus Christ died to save sinners, and that He saves them by a wonderful, mysterious something called "conversion." If people died, even little girls, before they were converted they went to hell —Brother Griffin never minced matters. After people were converted they joined the church, and when they died they went to Heaven.

As time went by there came to Mary an increasing uneasiness that she had never been converted. Sometimes after a severe sermon or a pathetic hymn, it amounted to positive agony. The nights were the worst. Many a time she cowered down in bed, drawing the clothes over her head, afraid to go to sleep lest she should die before waking. After a while, when every nerve was quivering, she would clutch her sleeping mother, in frantic fear.

"What's the matter?" Mrs. North would say anxiously.

Then Mary would burst out crying and reply mendaciously, "I don't know." Her mother never talked with her about religion.

"Are you sick, my daughter? Does your stomach ache?"

"No, mother."

"You have just been dreaming, Mary. Mother's here. It's all right."

Then the sobbing would grow quieter, and holding fast to her mother's hand the child would fall asleep, with the heterodox but comforting conviction that some way or other mother's hand would keep her from

going to perdition, even if she should die before she wakened.

Going to church those days was a great affliction to the child. There was always the danger that something would be said to prod up her fears; and even when that did not happen, one had to keep still in church—of itself a grievous thing. There was always the refuge of one's thoughts, however, and many an hour Mary sat primly erect with eyes fixed on the preacher, the picture of devout attention, while in reality she was driving her foaming steeds over fields of fancy fairer far than any "field of cloth of gold" spread for knightly tournament.

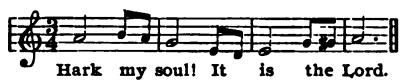
But when Mary was thirteen years old, Mrs. North, with much secret, agonizing prayer, took her to a "revival meeting" that was being held in the church. A very pale man with intensely black eyes and hair was assisting Brother Griffin. The moment this man arose in the pulpit it was impossible for Mary to go on with her dreams of brave knights and beautiful ladies. She had to hear and heed. The "sermon" reiterated ceaselessly what Mary already felt so keenly—the urgent necessity of being converted. Doctrine, illustration, appeal—all gathered around this one thing. The address increased in intensity and fervor. Mary felt her mother trembling and heard her stifled sobs. An unerring intuition told her it was all for her, the "unconverted daughter," but she braced herself in instinctive resistance.

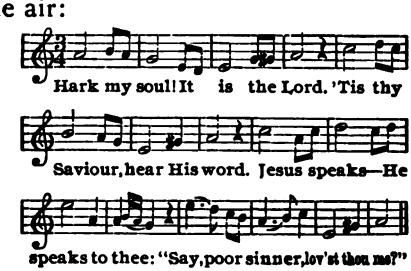
"I won't—I won't—I won't!" she said to herself, back of her set teeth. It was not the entrance upon a religious life that she resisted, but the humiliating breakdown which she knew would come with the least

move. Yet in the excitement of the moment she did not in the least distinguish between the two, and was increasingly conscience-stricken because she hesitated. A "poor sinner" indeed she felt herself to be, worthy of any kind of punishment.

The preacher left the pulpit and began to walk up and down the aisles, uttering fervid appeals. "Come, poor sinner, come!" he cried. "Come to the altar! Come to Jesus! He will meet you. Who will come? Just now!"

He stopped often to speak to one and another in the pews. Some, responding, went forward and knelt at the altar rail about the pulpit. Others got up and, putting on wraps and overshoes, left the church. A buzz of general conversation arose, and there was increasing confusion.

Suddenly a woman with plaintive voice began all alone to sing a hymn. The tune was minor and very slow:

The voice was strong and full of little quavers. Mary had never heard the pathetic words before, and they went like arrows to her heart. At the second line a few other voices joined in—all, men and women, singing the air:



Mary's mind was suddenly diverted from herself. The vision of the crucified One rose before her. She had often heard of the sacred hands and feet, nail-pierced for her; now she saw them. He was looking at her with unspeakable tenderness and asking the question:

"Lovest thou Me?"

She forgot the people about her—forgot even her mother and burst into violent sobbing. The voices sang on:

Mine is an unchanging love,
Higher than the heights above,
Deeper than the deepest sea—
"Say, poor sinner, lov'st thou Me?"

Mary started up. She rushed past her mother at the end of the seat, ran down the aisle and flung herself prone at the altar rail. It was her way of answering Jesus' question. Then instantly there came to her a strange delicious sensation, a flooding of light and love and ease and warmth. It poured into her heart and filled her whole being with ecstasy. She sprang to her feet, face illumined, and threw herself with an unconscious cry into the arms of her mother, who had followed her, weeping.

"Oh, mother, mother!" she cried. "I do—I do love Him!"

All easy of explanation, of course. All subject to the strict laws of mental action. All simply effect following cause. Yes, but why not? Physical and mental development are always by beautiful, divine order, why not spiritual development? The rose blooms by law, but does anyone question its fragrance? The heart beats by law, but we are none the less alive.

And shall not the processes by which the spirit draws near its Creator be those of sweet orderliness?

Mary's new experience affected her profoundly. For weeks she walked on air. At times the very hills and trees about her seemed clapping their hands for joy. Her young life had never touched sadness, save only in her religious fears, and now these were gone. Her night terrors ceased. She entirely lost her fear of death, and soon remembered the dread monster only to triumph over him in victorious spiritual imaginings. She was safe day and night—safe and warm and happy. Jesus, the "Lover of her soul," up in Heaven, was still in some mysterious way down on earth—at her side—hearing her prayers—modifying wind and rain and sun and circumstances to her need. He loved her! And she loved Him!

She began to read the Bible through in course, one chapter a day and three on Sunday. She began at Genesis; faltered not at Chronicles with its archaic, unpronounceable names; nor at Job, with its gropings, infinitely above her comprehension, after a philosophy of life; and ended triumphantly at the Revelation. The next day she began again at Genesis.

At fourteen—age of vast expansion, age of mysterious, leaping growth—Mary began to write poetry and dream dreams. The sweet, hum-drum home life ceased to contain her. She felt herself reaching out to take hold of infinity. She was solitary in the universe—at awful distances even from her mother. She washed dishes at the clean-scrubbed kitchen sink with the face of a seraph. Sometimes, gazing at the sunset clouds, she would seem to herself to fling her body over the shoulders of her soul as she had seen farmers

carrying bags of wheat, and fly away into infinite space! How free she was then! How exultant her soul was! How beautiful! How mysterious! What a wonderful thing that she had a soul! Why—what *was* her soul?

One evening in late winter Mary sat at the little table in the sitting-room. Her school books were before her, and her eyes were fixed on them; but the stiff poise of the lithe young body showed that her mind was away. Before the eyes of the happy girl rose in the hazy distance, the towers and turrets of an English castle, the ivy growing quite to the top, like the castle she had seen pictured in the story about Lady Katherine.

"Come, Mary," said her mother. "It is bed time."

The girl rose obediently and piled away her books. It was the work of two minutes to get into bed, evening prayer and all. The English castle shimmered hazily before her eyes all the time, and the moment her head touched the pillow she began again to live her dream life in it.

"Yes, it shall be an English lord. And I shall have servants and diamonds and a silk dress that rustles like Mrs. Sheldon's. And I shall walk in stately grace over the soft carpets of my drawing-room and my elegant train will sweep the floor!"

And all the time by a rapid alternate action of the mind she lived in the present as well. She heard her mother in the other room making the last preparations for bed. She knew when the stove-top was pushed aside and the big chunk of wood was dropped in to keep fire over night. She heard the soft whiff of the turkey-wing brush on the hearth; the twist, twist

of the clock key, winding up the low-hanging weights in the old clock; then all at once a strange, staggering step, and a chair creaking beneath a sudden, non-elastic burden. This last aroused her.

"Mamma!" she called sharply. There was a little silence.

"Yes, dear. Don't wait for me. Go to sleep."

A minute more, and with day-dreams interrupted and fear quieted, the eyelids drooped and Mary was asleep.

Later in the night she awakened suddenly. The English castle and the poetry were all gone, and in their place was a vague feeling of trouble. She raised herself on her elbow and looked about her. The room was flooded with moonlight. Her mother lay quiet at her side, but she was not asleep. Her eyes were wide open and looking up, and there was a strange smile on her face. It was like a white porcelain lamp-shade with the light shining through.

"Oh, mamma, what's the matter?" cried Mary. "Are you sick?"

Mrs. North looked at Mary. A little shadow crossed her face as if she were trying to remember something.

"You are sick, Mamma. Let me get up and run for Dr. Sheldon. I'm not a bit afraid."

The shade passed away and Mrs. North smiled at Mary in the sweet motherly way.

"No, Mary, not now. Perhaps in the morning—yes, in the morning you may go for him. That will be soon enough. Lie down again, darling."

"Does your head ache, mamma?"

"No, Mary, I haven't any pain."

She smiled again and looked supremely happy.

Mary's fear was quieted. She threw herself down by her mother's side, but she could not sleep. There was a long stillness. Then Mrs. North uttered a glad cry.

"Why, Herbert!" She tried to raise her arms, but they fell at her side.

"Oh, mamma, what is it?" said Mary, beginning to cry with vague excitement.

"Hush, darling. It's only papa. You're not afraid of him? Your own father? There he is again. There's a little door opened in Heaven, darling—there—the other side of the moonlight—and papa's standing there! The little door—just like the one in Revelation. Don't cry, darling. There's nothing to feel bad about any more—nothing in the whole world. I'm very happy, Mary."

"Are you, mamma?"

"Happy as the angels in Heaven!"

Mary lay silent, awed. She had heard of folks having visions—the people in the Bible had them.

By and by the light faded from the woman's face. She turned her head on her pillow and began to utter low, crooning words of mother-love and longing.

"Mary—Mary! Mother's girl! Yes, go and ask Dr. Sheldon to come the first thing when you wake up in the morning. I shall be asleep, maybe. 'He giveth His beloved sleep.' Don't try to waken me, darling, just go for him."

'I will, mamma."

"Mamma's own girlie!—Will you always pray, dear? Always pray?"

"Yes, mamma, of course I will."

"And always remember that God is good?"

"Yes, mamma."

"Kiss me, darling. There! Now I'll go to sleep. I'm so tired! Mother's little girl! Mother's brave—little—girl!"

The voice died away in a slow soft whisper.

Mary lay quiet so as not to disturb her mother's sleep. She pondered the matter and her heart burned with mystic emotions, for the room seemed full of Heaven. Then she began to be sweetly sleepy. The old clock in the sitting-room ticked drowsily away. It said very plainly, "God is—good!" "God is—good!" Strange that she had never noticed before how it uttered words. Then she slept.

After a little it began to grow lighter—the one window of the room looked toward the east—and denizens of a neighboring chicken-yard began to crow hopefully their anticipation of the coming morning. The light clouds lying low took on changing hues of red and gold. The cocks crowed more vigorously, and a milk wagon dashed rattling along the frozen street.

Mary wakened with a start and stretched out her hand to waken her mother lying quiet at her side. Then she remembered—mamma was sick. How pale she looked in the half light!

She crept carefully out of the foot of the bed strengthening her brave resolutions with all her might. A surge of fear and loneliness swept over her. She was very cold and her teeth chattered. With a mighty effort she dressed and let herself out of the street door. Then she turned and ran swiftly. She had forgotten her hat and coat, but after the first few steps the blood flowed hot in her young body, and she was not cold. The snow crunched beneath her feet.

There was not a breath of wind. Soon the sun was rising directly before her and she saw the great ball, half way up, large on the horizon. Its brightness was toned to gold and the mists made a glowing aureole about it. It seemed to the excited girl like the very gate of the Heaven her mother had been talking about. Tears rolled down her cheeks and fell on the snowy path. It seemed to her that she was not to stop for any earthly errand, but that her flying feet would carry her straight on through the glorious archway into the Heavenly Glory.

Dr. Sheldon lived a good half mile away, just in the outskirts of the village. He was a singular old man, over seventy, and combined farming in a small way, and especially bee-keeping, with the more responsible occupation of physician. He was very near-sighted, but for some reason he despised spectacles. He went about in his efforts to see, with his head thrust out in front of him; and his big, protruding eyes were the most conspicuous thing about him.

Mary dashed into the house. Melissa was gathering up the dishes from the breakfast table and confronted her with a pile in each hand.

"Is the doctor in?" panted Mary.

"Why, Mary North! How you scairt me!" exclaimed Melissa. "Is your mother sick or crazy, that she let you come off such a mornin' as this without your bunnit?"

"Oh, Melissa! Tell the doctor that—oh, doctor!" For at that moment the doctor himself, hearing a strange voice, came into the room, followed closely by his limping wife.

Mary ran to the doctor and seized his hand. She was speechless for the moment.

"You poor child," said Mrs. Sheldon, "what's the matter? Is your mother sick?"

At the kind words the tears came again, and Mary cried out her story on the good woman's shoulder, between the catches of her sobbing breath.

"For the land's sake!" exclaimed Mrs. Sheldon. "Of course he'll go. Lucky he's just had his breakfast. But set right down, Mary, and have a bite while Irey's harnessin' the horse." The good woman held her almost by force.

"No, no! Mamma may want me."

"But you'll get there just as quick and quicker if you wait and ride with the doctor. There, child, set down. Come, do eat a mouthful now."

Melissa piled her plate, but she could not eat.

"And did you come all this way without anything on your head? What was your mother thinkin' of?"

"Mamma was asleep," said Mary, in a trembling voice.

"Asleep?" The doctor turned on her sharply, with one arm in the sleeve of his buffalo-skin overcoat. "Didn't she wake up when you came away?" He thrust his face, with his near-sighted eyes, almost against hers waiting her answer.

"She was awake 'most all night, I guess. I waked up once and she—she—" Mary could not bring herself to tell of her mother's vision in this practical atmosphere. "She talked to me awhile, and then she went to sleep. She said she was tired, so I didn't wake her up this morning. I thought she had a headache."

The doctor pulled on his coat and pushed his cap down over his forehead.

"Is Ira 'most ready?" said he to Melissa.

The woman sped out the back door to help in harnessing the horse.

"I'll get a shawl and bunnit for you, Mary," said Mrs. Sheldon. "No, no! 'Taint a bit o' trouble. The doctor can bring them right back when he comes. You'd take your death o' cold to ride back without anything on your head. It's the Lord's mercy if you ain't got it already." She went into another room to get the wraps.

The doctor followed her. When she returned she not only brought the things for Mary, but was herself all wrapped for a ride. She was strangely changed, nervous and fidgety. She spoke hastily.

"The doctor thought I might as well go 'long too. My rheumatiz ain't very bad this mornin', and mebbe I can help a little if your mother should be much sick or anything."

"Here's the horse," called Melissa.

The good-hearted creature held the door open for the three to pass out, then followed to tuck in the robes. In a moment they were off.

There were three small bells attached to each thill of the vehicle, and they jingled as merrily as if the party were going to a wedding. There was not much talking. Mrs. Sheldon groaned at times, as the lurches of the sleigh pulled at the strings of her rheumatism.

The little house was soon reached. The doctor threw the lines over the dash-board—old Fannie never had to be tied—and, telling his wife not to hurry, Mary would help her out, went almost on a run up the nar-

row walk. He entered the house and pushed on to the little bed-room.

Mary obediently helped Mrs. Sheldon, groaning with rheumatism, in her strangely slow exit from the sleigh. Would the woman never let go her hand? They entered the sitting-room together. The doctor stood in the bed-room door with a furrowed face turned toward them. He was blinking, and he stooped forward as if there was a weight on his shoulders. Mary, dreading she knew not what, darted past him into the bed-room.

"Mamma! Mamma!" Her voice was high and strained with terror. She seized her mother's hand.

"Come away," said Mrs. Sheldon, weeping behind her. "Poor child! Your mother can't answer you now."

"Mamma!" screamed Mary, shaking the poor, cold hand. "Mamma! Mamma!"

Then the doctor drew her away by main force.

"She's dead," said he huskily.

Dead! For a moment Mary stood dazed. Then she understood. Her heart stood still for a moment, then seemed to break into a thousand quivering, agonized pieces. She broke from the doctor's hands, and with a loud scream threw herself prone across the form of her mother.

Who can think after her the thoughts of the girl whose mother lies dead in her sight!

The good neighbors came in and helped the doctor's wife till after the funeral. Then Mary went to live at Dr. Sheldon's. There were no relatives save cousins

living in Maine, so the Court a few weeks later appointed the doctor her legal guardian. The house was rented.

Youth, like a tree, has resurrection power within itself. Bitter weather comes to the green and growing tree, a great black frost falls, and all its pleasant, whispering leaves drop and decay. Where now are its airy romances, its happy gaieties? The bare, bereaved thing dashes its bleak branches against each other in death agony, and tosses its protesting arms to Heaven. Its heart's blood is frozen in its veins. It is dead.

But Time—great healer, best physician—Time, with its suns and showers, waits patiently on the desolate creature, and by and by a little thrill of awakening creeps up to the stiffened limbs. There is a swelling and a bursting at the seared scars of last year's fallen darlings, and little gray leaves appear. They gather form and greenness every moment, and by and by they flutter gaily over the graves of those that fell in autumn. The tree has risen from the dead.

But it is changed by its baptism into the grave. It has lost and gained—lost flexibility, gaiety; gained stability, seriousness, largeness. It is a bitter thing to die, but it is a good thing. Death forever ministers to a wider life.

CHAPTER III

IREY AND LISSIE

Ira was driving home from church the Sunday after the funeral, happy because Melissa was by his side. Neither the doctor nor Mrs. Sheldon had been able to attend that day, and Mary had insisted on walking.

The doctor had taken Ira as a "bound boy" from the country poor-house eighteen years before. "He's a little runt of a thing," the poor-master had acknowledged. "I guess he'n his ma purty nigh starved to death 'fore they all got the fever. That carried her off, you know, an' it purty nigh finished him, too—he was an uncommon long time gittin' well. Never complained—he don't talk much. Smart as a whip, though. He c'n read's well as I can, an' cipher a darned sight better. An' he c'n harness a horse as quick as a man," with a shrewd guess at a telling point in a doctor's business.

Ira grew up a little undersized, for starved he had been all his bleak childhood, but capable, honest and industrious. His shrewd common sense soon made him invaluable to the doctor, and before he was of age he became entangled in stronger ties than legal bonds, and never sought another home.

It was Melissa! The first time Ira saw her, as he and the doctor drew near the house, she stood rosy and hearty on the doorstep, a world of welcome in her good face for the homeless lad from the poor-house. The boy's heart melted within him. Melissa was

dreadfully cross-eyed, but he did not see that. Indeed, he never saw it. She was fifteen, and already a trusted "help" in the Sheldon household, and she received him with the frankly open arms of her great seniority. She coddled him with a motherly croon in her voice, and the boy felt a great lump rise in his throat and choke him. She tucked him into bed the first night—Mrs. Sheldon was already too rheumatic to climb the stairs—and he curled up in the plain little cot, and wondered if he too had got to Heaven, as the minister said his mother had.

But after a year or two the maternal ways of his companion began to taste of gall and wormwood—for instance, the exasperating rights she still took with his ears and hands on a Sunday morning, as they were all getting ready for church. What did she expect? That the hands of a *man*—drawing himself up as tall as he could at the word—were to be as white as a woman's? Melissa's hands were clean and pretty, nobody knew that better than he. But think of all the time they were soaking in the nice warm dish-water! A man has no such chance as that for his hands.

A crisis came at last, when one night—and it was after Ira was quite sixteen years old. Melissa actually sent him to bed! Not in so many words, but then he guessed he could see a hole through a ladder in the day time. He went—nursing his humiliation. He could not sleep for an intolerable time, so he got up and began to walk frantically back and forth feeling a sense of relief as his unclad feet tracked over the edge of the little rug on the icy barrenness of the floor. Then he happened to look out of the window, and the blood

rushed in a dizzying flood of fury to his head, for there, brazenly hitched to the front post, was Lan Johnson's mare! Ira knew the old bay plug, and he ground his teeth and shook his fist at her. Lan hadn't come to see the doctor, not a bit of it! He'd come to see Melissa,—goll-darn his infernal picture! Ira understood now why his room was better than his company downstairs. Must he endure this? He vummed he wouldn't. She should see that he wasn't a baby—she had a man to deal with. She'd got to stop walking all 'round over him the way she had been doing. As for Lan, he'd lick him within an inch of his life! He stood still and gloated and chuckled, dreaming of revenge. He felt his hand tingle as it closed on his rival's throat, and he saw Lan's long legs dragging helplessly out behind him as he himself just mopped the ground with him. Then a sudden sense of his own physical inferiority struck him with an agony he had never felt before. Oh, he was afraid he wasn't big enough to lick Lan!

He stood for ten minutes at the window, wildly reviewing all sorts of revenges—a shot gun, an anonymous letter—then crept into bed with icy feet and a sore throat, and, poor lad, cried himself to sleep.

But Lan Johnson seemed to have been affected by the absent treatment that Ira gave him, for he never came again, and the boy was molested no more in his worship of his divinity. Moreover, there was a certain new manliness apparent in Ira, from this time forth. Melissa noticed it and she spared him. She never again told him to wash his ears.

Ira's passion never flagged through a decade of

years. He was not only a worshiper, but a slave. He bowed his neck and became a hewer of wood and a drawer of water. The kindling never gave out and the water-pail never went dry. He tried repeatedly to avow his passion. He reviewed in secret many proper forms of beautiful and poetic words, but when the critical time came he could think of nothing but one tame sentence. The first time he said it, was of a winter's evening as they sat together very happily by the kitchen stove. It was cozy, no one could deny it. And Ira thought he had reason to hope from certain delicate signs that Melissa felt it to be a little cozier because of his presence.

"Lissie," said he, hitching his chair a little closer to hers. His voice shook and the cold perspiration broke out on his forehead. "Lissie, if you only knew how much I think of you—"

"Good gracious, Irey Craddock, what in the world are we a-thinkin' of!" went off Melissa, with the explosiveness of a pistol. Her face was very red. "That chunk ought to ben put into the stove right after supper, and here 'tain't in yet. The coals won't be right in the mornin', an' you know how hard that makes it gettin' breakfast."

"I'll git up and fix the fire, Lissie," said Ira, humbly. "But Lissie—"

But the girl was bustling around to "set" her bread, and Ira could no more make love to her now than to a threshing-machine.

It took him six months to gather courage for another mention of the subject. It was on a June Sunday, as they were walking home from church. The interruption was rather more prompt this time and Ira did

not get out so many words of his sentence by two or three. The next time, several months afterward, he only got out, pathetically, "Lissie, if you only knew how much—." And so, every time he tried, his sentence was curtailed by a word or two. Now, at last, after ten years, he could only stammer out the first word, "Lissie"—. There was always a peculiar tremble in his voice, and the girl had come to scent the danger from afar.

But to-day, as they drove slowly along, they were discussing Mary. Ira had no trouble in finding words about any subject but the one.

"She'll do 'em good," said he. "Her comin' into the house'll be a big blessin'. The old doctor and his wife was gittin' kind o' queer an' dried up, bein' as they hain't never had no childern of their own."

"I guess that's so," replied Melissa. "The doctor has talked more sence she come than in a month before. An' the old lady, she's really perkin' up."

"Howsomdever," resumed Ira in a dissatisfied tone, "I ain't so sure about it's bein' a good thing for Mary. They don't know no more about bringin' up a girl than I do about makin' a silk dress."

"Mebbe they'll learn," suggested Melissa.

"Mebbe they won't—them old folks! Why, the doctor's seventy-six, and his wife's two years older."

Melissa, three years older than Ira, straightened her shoulders in a slight movement of offended reserve. It was hardly perceptible, but the man could have bitten his tongue through. He felt about frantically for some way to help matters.

"Two year the better of him," repeated he, in an

innocently unconscious way. There was a slight accent on the "better."

He stole a glimpse at his companion out of the tail of his eyes. She saw him, and saw through him perfectly. Her features relaxed a little.

"Lissie," said he, his voice a-tremble. "Lissie, if—"

"Mary's pretty well brought up already." Melissa hurriedly resumed the conversation. "She's religious, an' willin,' an' neat as a pin. Pleasant, too. Her mother was a nice womern, an' Mary's got all her takin' ways. She come 'round the other day an' wanted to wipe the dishes. I told her to go 'long! It'd be a dark day when I couldn't wipe my own dishes, washing or no washing. But when I see she really wanted to, I let her. Thought it'd do her good, mebbe. An' she did it with the tears a-runnin' down over her face an' droppin' off. She stuck to it though, holdin' her towel 'way out in front of her, which shows she's neat. I jest had all I could do to keep from cryin' myself."

Ira drew a distressed cut of the whip across poor Fannie's ribs, a blow ostensibly against the fate that brought on Mary's sorrows.

"Darn it all!" said he impetuously.

Melissa looked shocked at such profanity.

"Excuse me, Lissie, but—but—when you come to think about it, it's a pretty tough thing for a man—for a little girl like that, I mean—to—to lose her mother."

Melissa gave another little movement, this time of subtle, penetrating pity. Who should know better how to be sorry for a motherless girl than a man who

lost his own mother when a little boy? What could ever make it up to him in all his life?

Ira felt the wave of pity in Melissa's heart instantly, through the three feet of space between them. His heart became all liquid within him in its mighty longing.

"Oh, Lissie," said he again, "if—"

"I wonder if they'll adopt her," said Melissa, talking right on as if she hadn't heard him. "I shouldn't wonder a bit, seein' there ain't no near relations. She takes it hard, poor child. For my part I think she ought to 'a been told long ago that them spells was dangerous, an' her mother might drop off sudden."

There was a long silence. Then Ira drew the long resigned breath of a continually disciplined man. Lissie was too much for him, so he remarked that the sleighing would all be gone in another day of such weather. After a while he resumed:

"She's as smart as they make 'em—'way ahead in school."

"She *is* smart," assented Melissa, "an' oncommon good lookin'. Queer how she carries her head, for she ain't a mite stuck up. It's the Boston way I guess—her mother had it before her. But she ain't really han'some. Her face is too peaked for that. She's good complected though, an' she'll pick up. She's cried ten pounds of flesh off her bones sence her mother died."

"I'm glad she ain't a boy," said Ira.

"You 'mind me of a womern I used to know," responded Melissa, with some asperity. "She was always a-thankin' God she wan't a man, 'cause if she'd been a man she might have used tobacco!"

"She was an ol' maid, I bet. '

"Wall, she was," Melissa admitted.

"I think the men have rather a hard time of it," said Ira, pathetically.

To which weak attempt to gain sympathy Melissa gave only a severe silence.

CHAPTER IV

AT THE DOCTOR'S

Three years passed. Mary, still at the doctor's, had outlived, not, indeed, the sorrow of her bereavement, but the keenest, ever-present pain of it. It struck her like a whiplash across the face as sometimes in the graying morning she heard the cocks crowing, or as in some evening ramble she faced a brilliant sunset; but it had ceased to be a constant flagellation. She had grown out of her "peaked-faced" childhood, and was in the first flush of young womanhood, graceful and beautiful. She was a little taller than most women, and slender, but her figure under her simple cotton gown showed the firm roundness of youth and health. Her complexion was of the peculiar quality which neither freckles nor tans. In winter it was brilliantly clear, and the summer sun and wind bestowed upon it a bloom like that of an untouched peach. The smooth curves of the cheek melted into the small, firm mouth and the delicately pointed chin with the same old shy droop, winsome by its very touch of sadness. Mary had been born with the little mark—generations before somebody had suffered. The Cupid's bow was still in her lips, but only when she smiled, and she did not smile often. Her brown hair was usually gathered into a great knot behind, but it had its own little silky, fluffy way of loosening into waves and tendrils over the forehead and about the ears—a way never compassed with curling tongs and crimpers.

But the eyes were what one never forgot in Mary's face. They were large, in color dark blue, and softened by the shading of long curling lashes. They had in repose the veiled seriousness of one whose inner life is lived apart from her fellows, but they opened widely at the world, and flashed their light at every appeal from the outside, as a mountain lake quivers to the whispering breeze. They seemed to speak sometimes.

"I'm beat if that girl's eyes ain't alive all by themselves!" Ira declared one day. "I never saw any eyes jest eggsactly like 'em."

"Yes," replied Melissa, "sometimes they're blue, an' sometimes they're black, an' sometimes I declare they're clear violet. An' how she carries her head! 'Tain't like no one 'round here, though her mother had the same way. She's an oncommon fine lookin' girl."

Mary's life had been simple and regular. She had graduated at sixteen from the high school her father had founded, and had had a year of private teaching, the best the little town afforded. She had learned all kinds of housework under the old-fashioned conscience of Mrs. Sheldon and the kind tuition of Melissa. She was an apt pupil, even though very often a preoccupied one.

The experiment of a child thrown suddenly into the hands of an old couple for up-bringing was working as Ira had feared, not altogether satisfactorily. In Mary's first terrible sorrow her school-girl friends had fallen away from her—a great grief is always isolating, and she was even more timid than in her childhood. As to the ways of the world she was utterly ignorant of them. Mrs. Sheldon loved her devotedly

and did her best to spoil her; and the doctor, even more moved by the young life coming so close to his, watched most carefully over her health. But Mary's inner life was never entered by them. They were a singularly reticent old couple; the words "religion" and "love" never by any chance passed their lips. Even the doctor's prayers, solemn and stately, were dignifiedly impersonal—made up largely of quotations from psalmist and prophet. Mary had mysterious upheavals of spirit, lifting her to a seventh heaven or dropping her to direful depths, but she could no more have spoken about such things to the old people than she could have proclaimed them upon the house-tops.

Books were a great relief to the lonely girl. The doctor encouraged her to study, and soon became very proud of her—he was an old Harvard graduate, and held advanced views concerning woman's education. Mary found also great relief and joy in the outdoor world. She was an excellent pedestrian, especially for a locality where women walk little and where even a man will "harness up" for a half-mile errand. She knew every hill and valley for miles around, and in times of trial or exaltation she instinctively fled to them. Brooks of clear water purling down in the sunshine over their pebbly beds, trees waving their thousand branches in the pure-aired winds, green shadowy dells shut in by fern-lined rocks—these all exerted a strangely powerful influence over the girl. Sometimes lying full length beside a rippling brook she heard God speaking in its murmurings more clearly than the voice of human kind ever came to her ear. And the low murmurings of the sweet pine woods seemed at times, as she lay on the ground at the foot of the

trees, to draw her soul quite out of her body, and into another world a thousand times more real than the world about her. No need to demonstrate to this girl the existence of spirit. She knew her own spirit. And she wondered sometimes as she lay quite motionless, not using her body, how she, her real self, could ever again use so gross and coarse a thing as matter of any kind. She would look at her hands lying inert and nerveless at her side, and think how clayey they were—like the cold hands her mother discarded when she died. Why couldn't she, too, spring out of the bonds and heaviness of her body and fly up to the stars, as her mother had done? What strange thing was it that bound her to her body? Why could death alone break that bond? What *was* death? Why, *what was life?*

Sometimes the things about her seemed full of her mother. They spoke words into her ears, as the old clock had once done. "God is good! God is good!" sang the brook. "Always pray! Always pray!" whispered the winds.

So Mary lived on for three years, studying hard, reading much in the doctor's old-fashioned library—books of history, poetry, even medicine—taking long rambles over the wooded hills, and thinking the unspeakable thoughts of lonely youth.

During the summer after Mary was seventeen, Dr. Sheldon's nephew, Stephen Bayard, again spent some months in Westland. He was the youngest son of the old man's only sister. She had married while the doctor was yet a child and had gone with her husband to Philadelphia. Stephen was the youngest of four children. His father and mother were now dead, and his brother and sisters were married and settled in

life. He had graduated from the University four years before, and had just finished a medical course. Dr. Sheldon hoped great things of his promising nephew. He, himself, while enjoying the theory of medicine, had never been overfond of its practice. Stephen had no need to pursue the profession as a means of livelihood, for the Philadelphia branch of the family had prospered in worldly affairs, and his income from his father's estate was ample; but he had wholesome views of life, and could not be content as an idler. He was going to Germany in the fall to continue his studies.

Mary recognized him at once as the rescuing hero of her snowball battle, and he, too, remembered instantly the dark eyes of the little girl whose faded mitten with the hole in the tip had lain all these years in a box of odds and ends in his possession. He spoke of the incident once, at which Mary was greatly embarrassed. He found it difficult to get acquainted with the girl. She plainly thought him very wise and great, but also very old. His spectacles—myopia ran in the family—his bearded face, and especially his knowledge of medicine, made him seem to her more nearly the doctor's age than her own. He was, indeed, ten years her senior. Attracted by her almost painful simplicity, he began to study the shy girl. Surprising her one morning as she was setting out for a woodland walk, he begged permission to go with her, and thereafter they went often together.

Mary soon found that her companion's thoughts about the out-door world were very different from her own. Though city born and bred, Stephen had spent long vacations in the country, and he not only loved nature but had learned how to observe her, an accom-

plishment largely lacking in those whose daily life is spent in the midst of her wonders. Mary had never seen any animal life in the woods but birds and squirrels, and they had fled in mortal terror at her near approach. But now the waste places suddenly teemed with shy, wild life.

"It's all in making them understand you're their friend," Stephen explained.

"But how can you make them understand you are their friend?"

"Just by moving gently. And sometimes by keeping still. A man walking through the woods, trampling down the twigs and leaves must seem to them as terrible a creature as a wild elephant would to us. They fly for their lives."

"Keeping still" once, at the root of a big pine, Stephen and Mary saw a mother partridge go anxiously by, leading a dozen tiny, fluffy chicks. They were so exactly the color of the ground about them strewn with brown pine-needles, that but for their motion the sharpest eye could hardly have detected them. Another time a fox trotted along to the windward of the watchers, all unconscious of their presence. Squirrels scolded themselves out and came at last to eat bread from Stephen's outstretched hand. Mary enjoyed it all intensely. Occasionally she glowed out into a bright life that revealed to Stephen a phase of her character that was very charming. She never dreamed that the association between them was becoming more than companionship, but Stephen soon realized that he had never before been so interested in a woman.

One day in their explorings they came to an open

space, where, by the side of an old rail fence, hundreds of violets were peeping up, half hidden in the grass and green leaves.

"It's the bird-foot," said Stephen, and he showed Mary how to recognize the variety—by their deeply lobed leaves and especially their two dark violet petals. He gathered a little bunch for her, and she pinned them on her gown. They were the color of her eyes, as she smiled up at him, and from that moment Stephen called her in his heart "Little Wood-violet."

Another day—in August—they came to a tiny valley between great ledges of rock, quite overhung by long-reaching, level beech-tree branches. Ferns and trailing vines grew from the rock crevices at the sides in tapestry of living green, and below was a many-ply carpet of dry leaves. There was one little space open to the sun, and here in the rich leaf-mold, a single dandelion plant was growing, its great serrated leaves sprawling widely. It bore one perfect globe of downy seed tops, one golden blossom and four or five buds of varying size, like the children in a family.

"Oh! here's a belated dandelion!" said Stephen, getting down on his knees to it. "The little gamin goes everywhere."

He took out his pocket knife, and, cutting the strong tap root below the ground, lifted the whole plant in triumph. They sat down on a little ledge.

A small wild bee was gathering honey from the flower. Its rapidly vibrating wings made a soft, droning noise, and it was so absorbed in its task that the gentle lifting of the flower did not disturb it. They watched the little creature.

"See her tiny proboscis," whispered Stephen. "And the pollen on her legs and all over her. Her velvet jacket catches— Oh! There—she's gone! Did you get a good look at her?"

"Yes," said Mary, in a tone of pleasure.

Stephen touched the flower with an affectionate motion. "I hope she appreciates the beauty of her dining-room. It's a golden palace, and she's eating her food from jeweled dishes if she only knows it. But I don't know. The bee has the name of being a sad utilitarian."

"She certainly notices it," said Mary, timidly.

"And to notice is the first step toward enjoying. Thank you. I never thought of that before."

Mary colored with pleasure. It was a great thing to have suggested a new idea to this learned man.

"I wonder," went on Stephen, "if perhaps some race of great, wise creatures—angels we might call them—are not perhaps studying us, our movements, our inner instincts, our blind gropings, just as we study the dandelions."

Mary's eyes flashed understanding.

"This flower, now! How little we sympathize with it. It's a very Ishmael on the earth—every man's hand against it. It is denied even the name of flower."

"Yes," said Mary, "the doctor calls it a weed."

"Yet the bright little chap holds up its undiminished head, as wonderful as an orchid and as beautiful as any flower that grows. It has been fighting for its very life ever since man learned to admire a smooth green lawn, but you'd never guess it had any trouble. Yes, farther back than smooth lawns—ever since man

found out how good its green leaves are, boiled for salad in early spring."

"It was a woman, I think," said Mary.

"So it was," laughed Stephen. "So it was. It's more than likely that we got our whole idea of 'greens' from it. Yet nobody presents it a medal, or knights it, as one of those old beef-eating English kings knighted a piece of a good ox he was eating one day—'Sir-Loin,' you know. But with this little creature, its very eye to business, so to speak—beginning operations so early in the spring—tells against it. For then there's no spinach or beet-tops large enough to boil."

Mary smiled her sympathy.

"But whether from our spring appetites or from pure hatred, it has been dug up by the roots or—just as bad—has had its head cut off systematically, for countless ages. Think of the lawn-mower and of the millions of little bud-stems, stretching ambitiously up into the world, decapitated every summer by that one demoniacal device."

He looked at Mary with a quaint humor in his spectacled eyes, and they laughed together at this slaughter of the innocents.

"Did you never notice the little buds," he went on, "late ones, after the lawn-mower has taken their older brothers by the score? How they seem to lie down close to the ground in their efforts to escape! It is almost human. Fancy how they feel when the awful, death-dealing machine comes rushing toward them, its cruel blades clattering!"

Mary shivered.

"However, come to think of it, their nerves can't be very sensitive, and they ought to lose their heads.

It's the old law, the survival of the fittest. They, in their turn, wage a deadly warfare against the unoffending grass. And we needn't pity them much anyway, for, thanks to a score or two of their shrewd devices, they are not by any means dying out."

"Do you know," continued Stephen, "the dandelion almost makes me a rank socialist, it has gained so much by that mode of life? There are about—let's see, this is a big head—there are about two hundred of the weak little blossoms huddled together in this community. One of the single flowers"—he pulled apart the yellow head, carefully detached a blossom and laid it on Mary's pink palm—"wouldn't make much ado in the world, but this big village of them makes a brave show."

"Yes, against the green."

"Then their standing army, this circle of sharply pointed green leaves at the base, is quite a formidable affair, entirely able to keep off any climbing marauders. And on occasion the soldiers can turn into nursery maids. You know how they put the flowers to bed by bending up around them when night is coming and the dews would wash away the honey and the pollen—their precious stock in trade."

"I never thought of it before—why the flowers go to sleep at night."

"I have a big book, a beautiful one, all about the wise ways of flowers. I am sure you would enjoy it. It tells about our dandy's flirtations, and how wittily he circumvents his enemies."

"Oh! thank you," said Mary, with a bright face.

"And now, what shall we do with our little plant?"

Mary offered no suggestion, and Stephen took it back to the tiny wound in the earth from which he had drawn it. He put it as nearly as possible in its natural position and carefully packed the damp black soil around it. A few of the delicate seeds detached themselves at the jarring and went sailing away on the breeze, beautiful miniature parachutes.

"It will feel like death for a while, with its tap root cut," said he. "But it's too brave to die easily. We'll come back and see it some day."

They did not, however. A week later a cable message came, announcing a seat unexpectedly vacant in Dr. Koch's laboratory, and the woodland expeditions were ended.

"Will you write to me, Mary?" said Stephen, as they lingered a little while on the moonlit porch the evening before his departure. The man was strangely embarrassed, the blood darkening his cheek, but on the girl's face there was only a smile of frank pleasure.

"I shall be glad to do so. I know you'll want to hear from us, and it will be easier for me to write than for the doctor or auntie."

"I want to hear from *you* specially, little Wood-violet."

The words were on Stephen's lips, but he could not speak them. She was so innocently unconscious, so utterly unawakened. Yet how could he go without a word!

"I want—I shall be—"

He could not get out another word.

Mary looked up surprised.

"You will be coming back to Westland some time?"

said she, thinking to help him finish his sentence. And he dumbly assented.

He never forgot how she looked at that moment as she stood by the door. Her hand rested on the casement, the white sleeve falling back from the firm, round arm. Leaf shadows from the vines were waving noiselessly over her. The pure child face, with the shade of sadness over it, was turned full toward him in the moonlight, and the great violet eyes looked wondering up. How unfathomable those eyes were! How eloquent their story! Stephen, looking into their depths, felt that he knew this girl better than anyone else in the world, yet how far away even he was!

A year passed, much like the others, only there had come regular letters from Stephen. Sometimes he wrote to the doctor, sometimes to them all—newsy family letters—but there was always, every week, a special letter to Mary. Then at Christmas time there had been a box filled with queer foreign presents for every member of the family; and on Mary's birthday—how had he found out her birthday?—he sent her a round locket of dull gold, with his own grave face inside. He had asked her for a picture of herself before he went away, and having no other she had given him in all simplicity a little one taken before her mother died—a child's round face, but it had the wistful solemn eyes and the sweet droop of the lips. Stephen framed it in a locket, the counterpart of the one he had sent her, save that "Little Wood-violet" was engraved on the golden case, and wore it always, unseen, over his heart. He had sent books, too—a treatise on "The Keeping of Bees," and some new medical books to the doctor, and charming "Nature

Studies" to Mary. She knew more about the dandelion now, but with a curious sense of honor she had never revisited the place where the one they had talked about was growing—if, indeed, it grew again. Stephen had said, "We'll come again." She did not like to spy upon his little plant. She would wait till he could go with her.

Mary had developed greatly, and an increasing restlessness was upon her. She wanted to study more. She wanted to go to college. So, along in August, it was decided rather hastily that she should spend some time in Boston, in preparation for Vassar. The old people had consented with great pride, but also with great sorrow. It was hard to spare the girl. But she was going on the first Monday of September.

Mary herself was in a state of exaltation, quiet but supreme. She sewed and planned and packed her trunks with the seraphic face she had sometimes worn before her mother died. On Saturday, all being done, she went out for a farewell walk. It was a glorious day. She was returning, her feet on the warm earth, but her head in the heavens, when she met with an adventure.

CHAPTER V

THE "STRANGÈRE"

"I baig your pardon, mees, but I will be tousand times obleege if you will tell me if dis de way to Westland?"

The young man asking the question stood at the crossing of the country roads, apologetic, puzzled, deferential. He lifted his hat.

The blood flushed into the girl's oval face and she looked up at him, a little startled.

"Yes, sir, this road leads to it direct. You can see the church steeple over there."

An expression of grateful relief replaced the puzzled look on the face of the questioner.

"Tousand tanks!" he ejaculated. "I am one strangère in dees vicinage, and I have nearly lost myself. Perhaps you will permit me to promenade at your side to de town if I do not trouble you very much?" And again he raised his hat.

"Certainly," said the girl, charmed with the deferential ways and hesitating speech of this "stranger."

"I am vaire much strange," repeated the young man, with a touch of pathos in his voice. "I am arrive from Paris only tree mont ago. My beesness in Bostong have been very presing and I cannot well spik de Eenglish."

"Oh, are you from Paris? I have a dear friend in Germany."

"Yes, mees, I am from Paris, de Belle Ville. You have visit my beautiful city, mees? Den you can understand my true sorrow dat I am away from her."

"Oh, no, I have never been there. But I have read about Paris and I know it is the most beautiful city in the world." Who was this gentleman from abroad who took her for a traveled lady?

"But surely you spik de French, mees? I am homeseeck, sometimes, to hear de music of my native tong."

"I have studied French some, and I can read it very well. But I cannot speak it. That seems so different."

"Oh, no, no, mademoiselle. *Ce n'est pas different, du tout!*" And he launched into a long sentence spoken, as it seemed to the girl, with alarming rapidity. She could not understand a single word of it and blushed the deeper.

Seeing her embarrassment, the stranger checked himself and begged a "tousand pardons." But, *vraiment!* If his young friend could read the French she surely could learn to "spik it with but one little pratique—one vaire little pratique."

"Perhaps," ventured she, emboldened by his evident benevolent concern for her, "perhaps if you would speak a little more slowly I could understand better."

"Ah! perhaps so. We will den try. *Est-ce que mademoiselle me comprends un peu mieux, à present?* Understand me a little better at present?"

"I understand *mademoiselle* and *comprends*."

"Ah! *Bon!* But I will now write it."

He paused in his walk, and drawing from his

pocket a tiny, gold-tipped pencil and a morocco card-case, he took from the latter a small card and wrote the sentence on its back. His hands were small and white, and on the little finger of the left one he wore a seal ring—a cameo of a swan, the white bird beautifully cut into a black ground. He handed the card to his companion with a little bow. She read the sentence aloud with ease and understanding, smiling delightedly up into his face.

"Ah! Mademoiselle has de accent vaire good. Excellente!" bowing again. "It is necessaire only one little pratique. Will mademoiselle permit another essay? *Il fait beau temps, aujourd' hui.*"

This being quite in line with the exercises in the girl's "French Method," she understood it at once to her great pleasure, and replied in English that it was indeed a lovely day.

"*Mais dites le moi en francais, mademoiselle.* Tell it me in French. It is most necessaire to train de ear, and to hear de sound of one's own voice. It is not necessaire for mademoiselle to be afraid, her accent was vaire good."

So the impromptu lesson went on, sentences slowly spoken—sometimes written on the backs of the little cards—then, when comprehended, repeated by the girl after her teacher. It was fascinating. The crossing of the roads where the two had met was quite a mile from the outskirts of the village, where the straggling sidewalks of the town had dwindled out into country paths and these in turn faded into the general grassiness, but the slow walk seemed to take but a few minutes.

The girl paused at last before a little gate in a picket fence. It opened on a gravel path which led

to an irregular white house a little back from the road. The house was a story and a half high and nestled down with an air of comfort in the midst of lilac bushes and elm trees. A piazza shaded by vines ran all along its front, and behind it could be seen a large orchard, the crooked branches of the apple trees bending with red and green fruit.

The girl paused with some embarrassment.

"This is my home," she said. "I do not know how to thank you for helping me so much."

But no, he protested with lifted hat and much emphasis that the thanks were all due her—that the favor of guiding him to the town was a very great one; and that, moreover, the pleasure of hearing his beautiful mother tongue spoken again, and so admirably spoken, was something he should not forget. But he was to be in town some days—he hoped to have the great pleasure of seeing mademoiselle again? This with the uplifted hat and the rising inflection that seemed to demand an answer.

The girl blushed deeply. She never knew what she said—she was sure it was something extremely awkward. But she was glad to remember that he seemed pleased. Then he gave her another of the little white cards, this time with no French on its back. She took it and in return gave him her hand, at which she thought he seemed a little surprised. But he took it and held it a moment deferentially.

"*Et, mademoiselle*—will she not also give me her name?"

His attitude plainly showed that he felt himself to be begging an infinite favor.

"Mary North."

"Ah, Mar*ie* Nort! A name vaire beautiful. I cannot forget it. Adieu, mademoiselle."

He lifted his hat again with a bow of deepest homage, and was gone.

The girl walked down the path to the house as if she were treading on the clouds. She dared not look around. Little bubbles seemed to rise in her throat and choke her.

The family were at supper—Dr. Sheldon and his wife together with Ira and Melissa, the "hired folks," who always sat at table with them. Mary made some excuse for being late, and hurried to her room to hang up her hat and collect her senses. She felt a curious relief that none of them had seen the young man. She thrust all the little cards deep into her pocket, and presently took her accustomed seat at the table. For the first time in her life she was intensely conscious of herself.

"What's the matter with you, Mary?" asked Mrs. Sheldon, at length. "You ain't eating a thing. You take too long walks, child."

"Oh, no, auntie. I am perfectly well, and I enjoyed my walk very much."

Then as soon as the words were out of her mouth she grew hot again. Could the innocent remark betray her secret?

"Where did you go?" asked the doctor.

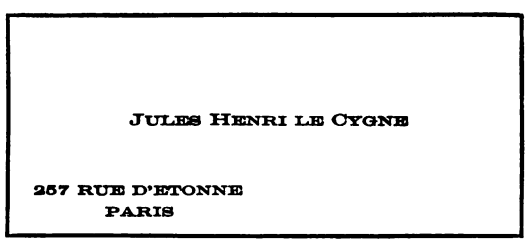
"Over on the Pinnacle and round by the creek on my way home."

What was the matter with her? How unnatural her voice sounded!

"You've burnt your face to a blister," volunteered Melissa, looking at her critically. "You must wash it in new milk to-night."

When they rose from supper the doctor called Mary to him, drew her face down to the focus of his near-sighted eyes and looked at her carefully. She turned guiltily red again. The doctor said "hum," thoughtfully, with his lips closed. Then he felt her pulse. Finding nothing for which he could prescribe he said "hum" again, and dismissed her. At last she could escape to her own little room, but not without being followed by the good Melissa with the face lotion.

Left alone at last, Mary shut the door and would have locked it if the innocent thing had had a lock and key. There was no likelihood that anyone would disturb her, for Melissa had already made her call, the doctor and Ira never came to her room, and rheumatic Mrs. Sheldon had not climbed the stairs for years; yet Mary carefully set a chair against the door in such a way that she would have long warning if anyone should try to enter. Then she drew forth the cards and spread them before her on the table. They were exactly alike, except for the different sentences written on the back of all but the one, and bore delicately engraved the name of



Mary did not know engraving from printing. In fact she had never seen more than two or three cards in all her life — carefully preserved relics of the

calls of some of the doctor's city friends—but she at once perceived that these were dainty and elegant. She could not imagine anything nicer. And the name—Jules Henri le Cygne! It was the name of a gentleman. How gentlemanly he had been all the time! And there came the harassing fear that she had been awkward and uncouth. The blood flamed into her face anew at the thought. Probably he was even now laughing at her as a green country girl who had afforded him a half hour's amusement. But no! It was not justice to him to think he could do such a thing; he was too much of a gentleman. He said that he had enjoyed the walk and had spoken about seeing her again. How handsome he was with his dark hair and curly moustache! She thought of the thin, stiff hair that adorned the upper lips of the village boys—somehow she did not think of Stephen at all—and laughed aloud as she compared them with the thick, dark silk of this young man's moustache curving gracefully upward at the ends.

Presently she fell to reproaching herself—calling herself a goose and worse to go mooning over a chance acquaintance in this way. He was nothing and nobody to her anyway. The afternoon's incident meant simply that she had chatted a few minutes with a passing stranger. Then all at once a guilty feeling swept across her. Why had she not frankly told the folks at supper about meeting the strange man and how he had inquired his way of her. Then it would have passed off as the commonest thing in the world. But it was too late! She could never speak of it naturally now, and she feared her tell-tale face. What should she do? Oh, she wanted her mother.

The lonely girl fell into a long and bitter weeping. She cried until it grew dark. Then she stopped suddenly—an idea had come to her. She rose eagerly, lighted her lamp and took down her old "French Method" from among her school books in the hanging book-case. She set the card on which there was no sentence upright before her, supporting it by the lamp; then she attentively studied the others. She repeated the phrases over and over in a hushed undertone—he had said the ear must be practiced. Soon she knew them all by heart. Then she opened her book and studied, still in the undertone, till past midnight.

Making ready at last for her rest, she knelt at the side of the white bed for her accustomed prayers, and again there swept over her spirit that intense longing for her mother. Alas, alas, that the mother was not there!

She rose from her knees, wrapped the cards in a piece of white tissue paper, and put them in her trunk, a little old box covered with hairy leather. It had been her mother's.

She did not close her eyes in sleep all night.

The next day came, a perfect day. The sun swinging slowly north was abating the ardor of his summer rays, and had become a more comfortable lover. Mary started early to church, greatly desiring to be alone. Except in the worst weather she always walked to church, though it was nearly a mile away. The trees in the apple orchard by the roadside were bending with fruit, but the foliage of the maples shading the sidewalk was still heavy and green, untouched by the breath of the coming autumn. The Indian corn in small patches near the road was bleaching a little

toward its ripening, and rustled sociably in the light breeze. Full-grown grasshoppers whizzed awkwardly about Mary's slow-moving feet. A few cicadas were trebling out their shrill cries in the trees. The crimson faded from the girl's cheeks, the tumult from her heart. The world began to seem almost the same as ever. Out-of-door-dom is a foe to physical frenzies, a solace for soul sicknesses. Mary felt her heart expand. Thoughts of God came again to her and she was filled with sweet devoutness. Yesterday seemed like a dream of the night. She reached the church some time before the service began, and sat waiting, cool and sweet in her muslin gown and broad white hat. The congregation gathered in. The doctor came blinking up the aisle, followed by his wife walking stiffly, and she in turn by Melissa. Ira always sat humbly on a rear seat.

The windows of plain glass, quite like those of an ordinary house, were wide open. The one near Mary was curtained by Madeira vines with their glossy leaves and delicate white blossoms. A faint odor from them breathed languorously in at the window. The bees buzzed busily among the blossoms—all days are secular to bees and blossoms. Mary was saturated with peace. She leaned her head on her hand. The bees droned away and the leaves rustled lightly. The blood crept slowly through the girl's tired brain. Her lids drooped and a sweet drowsiness fell over her.

The preacher arose in the pulpit and she heard him say, "We will begin the worship of God by the use of the one hundred and ninth hymn." The voice seemed unreal and far away, a part of the buzzing of the bees, and the whispering of the leaves. But the

next moment there was a sound of light footsteps in the aisle at her side and she caught a glimpse of a familiar figure. Her heart gave two or three heavy throbs and the blood leaped through her in great waves. She sat still, motionless, but with every nerve a-quiver. The springy footsteps passed on up the aisle, and Mary, looking straight at the preacher, saw the usher showing the young Frenchman into the third seat in front of the doctor's. She took one of the hymn books out of the book-rack and carefully found the hymn for Mrs. Sheldon. She had not glanced at the young man, yet she saw him vividly.

He seated himself and bowed his head reverently for a moment, seeing which the girl's heart gave a great bound again. What a good Christian he must be! Mary thought with shame of her own easily wandering thoughts. Why, even now, though her head was bowed—for the hymn was over and the minister was praying—even now she was thinking of other things. And then she put forth a great effort not to think of "other things."

The sermon was long and dry and the room grew warm, but through it all Mary was not for one moment again sleepy. When the service was ended it took Mrs. Sheldon a long time to get started, and Mary behind her reached the aisle just as the young man was passing the doctor's pew. Their eyes met. He gave a little start of pleased surprise and a slight bow. That was all, but Mary went home from church again in a strange turmoil of mind. There was a new pleasure, but with it a kind of fear. She thought it must be because she had not spoken frankly about meeting the young man the day before.

When Le Cygne left Mary at the gate on Saturday evening he walked straight down the street to the hotel. The smile vanished from his face, and a look of weariness and annoyance took its place. There were many small wrinkles about his eyes. He registered impatiently—*J. H. Le Cygne.* After supper he lit a cigar and sat down in the office of the hotel, stretching out his legs and resting his feet upon the back of a chair as high as his head. Here and there around the room sat men smoking and gossiping.

Le Cygne puffed his cigar and thought moodily of many things. But sometimes he smiled a little, thinking of the country girl. Suddenly his attention was attracted by hearing her name—Mary North. Two of the villagers were talking about her.

"The ol' doc had a new deed made out," said one of them, "givin' it to her in her own name. I s'pose he did it jes' to teach her business, but 'pears to me it's kind o' foolish."

"I do' know—'tain't such a bad idee. Not with her. She's smarter'n greased lightnin'," responded the other.

"'Twan't wo'th much when she an' her mother lived in it, but business is creepin' up that way fast. Mary'll have a nice little property there ag'in she wants it," said the first speaker.

"How much *is* it wo'th?" replied the other.

"Wall, the piece on Si Martin's corner, jes' 'cross the road, sold fer fifty dollars a front foot. But then they wanted it fer the new postoffice, and gov'ment always pays more'n a thing's wo'th."

"How much is there in the North place?"

"A hunderd foot."

Both men—three men, indeed,—did a little hasty mental arithmetic.

"Wall," said one of the two, "Mary cud prob'ly git about five thousand out of it, any time she wanted to. It's a sightlier place'n Si Martin's. An' havin' the postoffice opposite 'll make it sell. Might git fifty-five hunderd."

"Maybe the doc's got some hold on it. They say he's spent no end o' money on her schoolin'. Private lessons and a new pianner—nothin's too good fer her. And the rent of her place hain't much more'n bought her clo'es."

"No, he's give all that to her. I asked Irey last week when he was over to the mill. He says the ol' doc an' his wife think the world an' all o' her. Goin' to send her to Boston next week, an' to college when she's ready. An' like's not they'll leave her their money; there ain't no other heir in sight but Steve Bayard down in Philadelphy—that city chap you know that was visitin' the doctor last summer. I tell ye, Mary got a darned soft snap when she fell into the ol' doc's hands. She'll never sleep in her hat!"

"Wall, she deserves it. She's a good girl, Mary North is. I do' know who deserves good luck more'n her."

No one disputed this final sentence on the case, and the talk drifted off in another direction.

Le Cygne threw away his cigar and rose to go to his room.

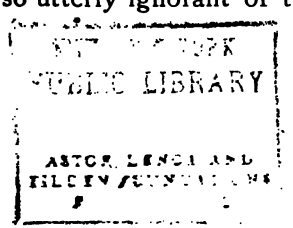
"Call me at nine; I want to go to church,' said he to the clerk behind the counter.

Melissa's dinner was ready fifteen minutes after the family reached the house on their return from church.

Melissa was a faithful church-goer. "I don't feel no call to stay to home from church for no Sunday dinners," she would say, with a convincing quantity of negatives. "I hope I'd be willin' to go without the means of grace if anybody was sick or anything, but when there ain't, there ain't no need of it. An' my folks don't have to wait till no three o'clock neither for their dinners. It's all in knowin' how to plan your work."

But again Mary could not eat—not even Melissa's chicken. And again the doctor solemnly examined her tongue and pulse. Oh, it was the going to Boston in the morning, of course—nervous excitement. She would get over it. He went out to the orchard which was thickly set with bee-hives underneath the trees. He was very fond of the place and spent hours in it, "visiting with the bees," as he said. They crawled over his hands and face, never stinging him, and he listened to the music of their soft droning and was happy.

That afternoon Mary would have gone out again for one of her long walks, but a restraint, a mixture of motives, held her back. The young man might be walking, too, and she might meet him again. At any rate it was best to stay at home. So she sat on the porch reading her Bible—that was surely a right thing to do—and it was there Le Cygne found her when he called, a half hour later. Mary saw him coming along the walk and rose to meet him. He sat down beside her and chatted pleasantly about the sunshine and the sermon. His perfect manners set her at ease at last, and she found herself talking freely about herself, her studies and even her Boston plans. She was so utterly ignorant of the ways of the world that she



never thought of calling Mrs. Sheldon, who was taking her usual afternoon nap. Mary had never in all her life been told, nor had she happened to learn it in her reading, that it was not best to form acquaintances with gentlemen, except as they were introduced by responsible persons.

"Bostong!" A smile of extreme pleasure lit up the young man's face. "Ah! *Ciel!* I myself return soon to Bostong. Mademoiselle will be in some boarding-school?"

"No, the boarding-schools do not give me quite the teachers I want. Besides, they are—the best ones—very expensive. I—"

She hesitated. Would he think less of her if he knew she was going to "board herself"? But she told herself with instant vehemence that she was not ashamed of it. And all the while the sympathetic, dark eyes drew her on.

"I am going to—the doctor has an old friend in the city who has found a pleasant little room and I am going to board myself." There, it was out!

"Ah! Live in apartments. That will be charming. One often does in Paris. It is a truly comfortable and pleasant way of life."

This was a new view of the case to Mary. The "boarding herself," undertaken almost wholly from motives of economy, began at once to surround itself with a delightful atmosphere of romance.

"Mr. Dryer says the room is sunshiny and bright."

"Ah, a fit place for one like mademoiselle."

"And," trying to ignore the compliment, but with rising color, "and I shall take fruit and jelly with me, and they will send me boxes from home."

"Ah! It could not be better. And mademoiselle will surely permit me to give myself the great honor to see her sometimes? Or will she be too vaire busy?"

"Oh, no! The doctor doesn't want me to study too hard. I shall be glad to have you come." She tried to be calm, but the little choky bubbles were trembling up into her throat again.

"And the street and number, it is—?" taking out the morocco card-case.

He wrote it down carefully at Mary's dictation.

"Twenty-six Vevey Street. Ah, I cannot forget the numbre. It is just my years—just how old that I am," with a smile of engaging frankness.

"I am eighteen," said Mary. Such candor on his part should meet return.

"Eighteen! Mademoiselle does not look it. What then is it that mademoiselle will study in Bostong?"

"Music and the languages, principally. Professor Hertzog will direct me. He thinks I can be ready for the junior class at Vassar in a year."

"Ah! Vassaire? It is one school?"

"Yes, a woman's college."

The young man seemed silenced with awesome admiration and Mary did not know what to say next.

Presently he reached over and took the Bible from her lap.

"Ah! Like my dear mother—always studying her Bible. My mother was a membre of de Reformed Church in Paris. She was one sainte. But she is gone."

The pathos of his voice touched Mary deeply. The pain of her own mother's death swept suddenly over

her. Her eyes filled with tears and her voice trembled as she said:

"My mother is gone, too."

"Ah! You can sympatize—*we* can sympatize."

There was a long silence.

"I must make my adieux," said the young man. "I have some busi— I have to meet a friend. But I will see mademoiselle again soon in Bostong, if I may—vaire soon, *chère mademoiselle.*"

This time he offered his hand first, and pressed Mary's gently and a little sadly, as if still remembering his mother. Then he went away.

Mary sat still where he left her, in a kind of half trance. It seemed like a dream. The vines at the side of the porch swayed in the light breeze and the sunlight flickered through, making moving patterns on the floor. The cicadas in the tree-tops cried happy tremulos to the girl's ears.

Presently Mrs. Sheldon came stiffly out from her nap, groaning with the pain of walking after her sleep, and dropped into the chair the young Frenchman had vacated not ten minutes before. Her face showed puffy on one side where she had been sleeping.

Suddenly the thought came to Mary that now was the time to tell Mrs. Sheldon about the young man, and the chills shivered up her spinal column. Oh, she couldn't do it! She had not tried to conceal the matter—it had all just happened. And now she would wait. Perhaps she would write it from Boston. She surely would if he called on her there. It meant nothing anyway. Why should she lay herself open to ridicule by mentioning such a trifle?

In many of the rural districts of New England it is

still customary to keep secret as long as possible all matters pertaining to courtship. Engagements are never announced there, and even wedding preparations are made by stealth. A girl who is the soul of truthfulness about everything else will solemnly deny her engagement up to the very day of her marriage and feel entirely conscience clear in so doing. Asking the consent of the girl's father is never dreamed of, at least not till the engagement between the young man and woman is definitely compacted, and it frequently happens that the parents are as much surprised as the rest of the world at the plans of the young people.

The turmoil of mind was returning upon Mary. She went upstairs to her room, knelt by her bed and prayed earnestly about the whole matter, but she rose undecided. All the rest of the day she tried to find opportunity to speak, but it did not come. The next day the doctor himself took her to Boston—her piano had been sent a week before. She was passionately fond of music and was to study it with Professor Hertzog. This celebrated teacher had also consented to take general direction of her studies in languages.

CHAPTER VI

PIT DIGGING

The doctor and Mary reached Boston at noon on Monday. The doctor had long ago grown unaccustomed to city ways and had gladly availed himself of the help of his old friend in the matter of selecting a room for Mary. It was the back parlor of a little first floor flat. Mary was to be the only roomer. Her landlady, Mrs. Clark, with four frightened looking children, lived in the three back rooms. Mrs. Clark expected to retain the front parlor, but purely as a matter of New England propriety, for she never sat in it herself and rarely had callers. Canvassers and such she disposed of at the door. "'Cepting when Charles comes home," with a deprecatory air. "And he's a commercial traveler and don't come home but twice a year. So Miss North won't be disturbed often with any noise in the front parlor."

Mary declared herself not at all afraid of being disturbed by the semi-annual Mr. Clark, but the doctor was still not at all satisfied. He held long, private conferences with Mrs. Clark, and on the morning of the second day, as Mary returned from a little errand down the street, she found the folding-doors between her room and the front parlor thrown open and her old friend beaming upon her in the doorway in a delight almost boyish.

"Why, Uncle Doctor! What is it?"

"I thought my girl wouldn't object to this room, too; that is, the use of it."

"Oh, I can't afford it, I'm afraid."

"Can't afford it! Well, maybe *you* can't. But *we* can—Aunt Polly and I. We've got some money and we've no children, Mary, but you."

The doctor stayed a whole week, though he had not spent a night away from home before for twenty years, save perhaps with some desperately sick person. He lingered over the rooms, changing this, moving that and buying new things with what Mary thought was unheard-of extravagance.

"Why, uncle, I don't need this," she would say. But the doctor went straight ahead as if he enjoyed it, as indeed he did.

"I want you to be comfortable, Mary. I want you to be as nicely fixed as any of them. Maybe you'll have friends, and want a room in which to entertain them. This will be just the place. It's turned out all right—better'n I expected."

Finally there was no excuse for the doctor's longer delay. Mary went with him to the great South Station.

"Are you sure you won't be lonesome, my girl?" said he fondly. He put his old face down close to hers to see the dear features.

"I shall be too busy with my studies," replied Mary, smiling back. Truth to tell, she was dreadfully lonesome that moment.

"I think you'll be safe, Mary."

"Of course I shall be, uncle. Don't you worry. I'll be very careful. I'll remember all you've told me about gas, and matches, and everything. And I'll never go away and leave my doors unlocked. And I'll write every week."

The gong sounded. It was heart-breaking, but he must go. Mary's tears were flowing freely. He had never seemed so like a father to her before. She threw her arms about his neck and kissed him many times. He kissed her, too, a thing he had not done half a dozen times in all the years she had lived at his house, said good-bye in a shaking voice and was gone.

Mary was soon in the full swing of her studies. She enjoyed her new life keenly, the great city, her teachers, and especially the people. She never wearied of the people—masses, streams of them. She stood dreamily still, sometimes, at the top of some hilly street to look back at the dark human river on the sidewalks, flecked here and there by the bright colors of a child's dress or a lady's hat. It seemed to her like the water of the brook at home—flowing, flowing ever. Where? And it had flowed on, and out, somewhere—this human stream—since before Christ was born, almost since Adam; flowed on and out into—where *had* it gone? Sometimes she seemed to look down on them all, herself included, from some great spirit-height. What was the meaning of it? What was that thing—her body there—a little, floating, helpless atom among the others? Then her soul would suddenly drop back into that body again, and— Oh, she mustn't be late to her class!

But in the midst of all the novelty there lay always in the background of her consciousness her brief acquaintance with the young Frenchman. A hundred times she thought she saw him on the street. The graceful "city ways" that met her at every turn reminded her of him, for in him she had first seen them. She was keenly humiliated that he did not

call. Every possible explanation, but the right one, passed through her mind. Perhaps he had not yet got back to the city. But he said "very soon." Was not three weeks very soon? But probably he had forgotten all about her. How could she expect a great man of the world to remember an obscure country girl? The story books told of such things—she used to dream of them herself—but they did not happen in actual life. And really she didn't care.

But how glad she was that she had not told anyone, not even the doctor. Her face flamed at the bare thought of having to explain to him by and by that the "gentleman caller" she had expected had never come. If mamma had been alive! — Well, she would forget it.

It was indeed fading out of her mind, to her real relief, when, returning from an afternoon recital one day, she found a card that had been slipped underneath her door. She knew it before she picked it up. Below the familiar name were penciled the words in the delicate sharply-angled handwriting: "Will call again about eight."

Mary flew to Mrs. Clark. Yes, a young man had called and left the card. Was he a special friend of Miss North's? with a little emphasis on "special" that brought the blood to Mary's cheek.

"Oh, no. Just an acquaintance that I made in Westland," said Mary. "And I can see him in your parlor?"

"Yes, of course. That's what your uncle got the room for, ain't it?" replied Mrs. Clark, rather crossly.

Mary was glad to get away, and Mrs. Clark turned back to her sewing. How the girl had blushed! The

young man was from Westland, so it was all right, of course. He was her "beau" probably.

Mary never knew how the hours passed till eight. He had not forgotten her after all. She was glad, yet she was strangely anxious and upset in mind. What did it all mean? Then she fiercely chided herself. All young ladies have calls. A call means nothing—nothing in the world. O, dear! She would rather he had never come. But the moment he appeared the tumult in her mind vanished. He held her hand an instant as he entered as if he could not help it, looking at her as she had never been looked at before.

"At last!" he breathed. "It has seemed one age to me. My business detained me—kept me a most unwilling slave. I expected to get away every day, or I might have ventured even to write one little word."

"I am glad to see you," said Mary. She felt the curious choking sensation again. She hoped she was being polite.

"Ah, mademoiselle has not then forgotten me. And how do you find Bostong?"

"I like it very much." She was recovering herself. "The dear doctor, my guardian, you know, came down with me and arranged everything. I think the city is very beautiful. I suppose Paris is still more lovely?"

"Paris is lovely, but Bostong is beautiful, too," was the gallant reply.

"The vines over the houses especially. I never saw such beautiful colors. Not even in Westland. Have you been at Westland all the time?"

"No, mademoiselle. I was obliged to go up into Maine—to Portland. I am in de service of de French

government in dis country to see about some timbers for ships for de navy, and de duty to my government comes first, you know, mademoiselle."

Mary nodded and smiled appreciation of his faithfulness.

"But I shall now be in Bostong for de winter. I could not be more glad. Mam'selle will remain de season, too?"

'I think so."

"*Bien!* And de studies—will mam'selle tell me about dem?"

Mary told him about them very willingly, showing him her lessons in the books and chatting of her teachers. She especially told him about her French and music.

"But Professor Hertzog is awfully cross to me sometimes, when I can't play just to suit him."

"Cross to *you?*"

"Oh, yes, indeed, and I presume I deserve it. At least I must seem very bungling to him, though I try hard. He knows—he knows everything.

"He may be one very great and wise man, but I do not see how he can be cross to you. *Bien,* play a *morceau* for me, mam'selle. May I judge myself if you bungle?"

His tone conveyed his utter unbelief that she could possibly bungle.

"Perhaps you play, monsieur?"

"Me? Oh, no! I cannot—never. But I have heard good music. I have heard Liszt play—in Germany. I am perhaps one little judge of good music."

"Have you heard Liszt? Really—yourself? Oh, I am afraid to play before you."

"Do not be afraid. I am not to be afraid of. See, I have an interest in you. I shall be the most indulgent critic. Have the goodness, mam'selle."

He rose and offered her his arm. Mary had never before seen such an act of courtesy, but she rose confusedly, and he led her the few steps to the piano. She recovered herself by a great effort. The selection was Chopin's Funeral March.

She finished, and her hands and head dropped.

"Ah, that was grand! That spoke to my soul, mam'selle. It came from your soul, I know well, or it could not have spoken to me. You will not play anything more? Do not, then, that I may not lose the spirit of that one. Chopin," glancing at the title page, "I revere him."

He escorted her to her seat and they talked of music, art, many things. Mary had never before talked with such animation and freedom. She seemed to herself like another person.

When Le Cygne finally departed, it was with permission to call again in a week. "I cannot consent to myself to come oftener, for I know mademoiselle is vaire occupied," he said, lifting his hat in a final bow.

After her caller left Mary tried to study, but the Frenchman's face was on every page of her book. She went to sleep with his voice in her ear, and there was no darkness in her mind. In the morning, however, there arose within her the same old contradiction of feelings—happy little exultations, then self-chidings and a vague, uneasy fear. This state of mind lasted the whole week, and indeed to some extent, as long as Le Cygne's calls continued. Sometimes it gave her acute pain. But it always vanished

when he came—charmed away by some strange influence of his presence.

The next call began very much like the first. Then Mary must again play for Le Cygne. Later in the evening Mary noticed that her caller appeared far from well. His face, always pale, was haggard.

"You are not well, m'sieur?" she exclaimed, anxiously.

"Only a headache, mademoiselle. The smallest trifle. It will soon pass away. De headaches are from too much business, but I am under de doctor's care for them."

"You must not work so hard," said Mary with concern. "But can I not do something for you now? I have some phenacetin—the doctor has taught me a little about medicine, you know."

He declined with many thanks. But if mademoiselle would make him a cup of tea—if he might be bold enough to ask? The pain was truly excruciating.

Mary flew into the other room to make the tea. Waiting for her, Le Cygne quietly examined his surroundings. Mary's purse lay on the piano with her hat. He picked it up and opened it. It contained a ten dollar gold piece and some silver. He slipped the gold piece into his vest pocket and put the purse back in its place.

Mary brought the tea and he drank it and seemed to feel much better.

"I do not know how to apologize to mademoiselle for all de trouble. In Europe dey have tea everywhere, but it is mostly in de afternoons. I have broken all de regulations by asking for it in de evening."

"It's a pleasure," said Mary, "not a bit of trouble. But, m'sieur, is it right for you to work so hard? You must consider your health."

"It is necessaire—de work, but I will now consider. I have not before been asked in a way which so appealed to me. But has mademoiselle ever made de afternoon tea? No? It is quite by itself—not like anything in de world. If you will permit me I will come to-morrow afternoon if I can get away. It will be de relaxation I need. I will come and teach you how. Will mam'selle consent to let me have the pleasure?"

"Oh, yes, only I am afraid I have not the—"

"Oh, mam'selle will permit me to bring de service—a vaire little thing in repayment for this refreshment," pointing to the empty cup on the table, but thinking of the gold piece. "Mam'selle need not think of it again—not a thought. I shall be so vaire happy."

The next afternoon Le Cygne visited a department store. He bought a little "afternoon tea," the tiny brass kettle on a small iron crane with a spirit lamp underneath, and a cheap china tea service,—teapot, two cups, sugar bowl and creamer. He next visited a tea store and bought half a pound of "India," smelling it like a connoisseur. He bought also a pound of sugar in lumps, a little tin box of delicate wafers, some lemons and a small bottle of wood alcohol. He even thought of a bottle of cream, but gave that up as too complicated a matter. Soon after four o'clock he presented himself at Mary's door, loaded with his parcels.

"I am one pretty looking object with my packages," said he laughing. "I feared you would say, 'Go 'way

dere, grocer's *garçon.* Don't you know you must go de back way?' But I did not dare trust de delivery. Sometimes dey deliver in time and sometimes—" He shrugged his shoulders.

He threw his hat and coat on the piano and began opening the parcels with boyish delight. He placed their contents in order on the little center table, rattling out his comments with many French exclamations.

"*Tiens!* It is not a showy one, but the curves are artistic. And the little cups—*voila!* I am glad that not one is broken. And this is the sugar cup, and the cream—what do you call it?"

"Pitcher," suggested Mary.

"Ah, *si!* Pitcher! And I remember—*jug* it is in England. It is a not beautiful word. Now we will fill the lamp and make the tea."

He produced a match from his pocket, then paused, holding it doubtfully aloft.

"Ah! But my mother used to have dem washed—de dishes from de store. That is one difficulty."

Mary laughed gleefully and gathered up the things.

"Nothing but what we can overcome I think. Just wait a minute, m'sieur."

She disappeared in the other room, returning in a little time with everything shining. She had arranged the dishes on a doyley on a little silver tray, a trifle that had taken the doctor's fancy as he was buying her few dishes. She had also filled the cream pitcher. Notwithstanding Le Cygne's injunction "not to think of it again," she had bought an extra gill of cream that morning.

"Ah, *merci!* But I had also forgotten de water and

de spoons. I cannot do it alone after all—it takes two. I make mam'selle much trouble, but will she now also fill de kettle with water and bring de spoons? It must be fresh—quite fresh and cold."

Mary brought the spoons and the water fresh and cold as he directed. Then the lamp was lit and put in place, burning up against the bottom of the kettle with a great, beautiful, blue flame, semi-transparent and wavering with every breath. In a few minutes the water was bubbling and the steam curling up from the kettle's nose. They were sitting close together at the table. Mary took the little teapot in her hand.

"*Tiens!* I am to do it all this time," said Le Cygne, taking it from her. Their hands touched.

He rinsed the teapot with the boiling water, Mary running again to the other room to empty it. In taking it back from her their hands touched again. Then he opened the little canister of tea, carefully measured out four teaspoonfuls—an enormous quantity it seemed to Mary—and poured the boiling water upon it.

"*Voilà!*" said he. "In a little time we shall have some tea."

"But must it not be boiled?" said Mary.

"*Jamais! Jamais!*" cried Le Cygne. "It is de boiling that spoils de tea—utterly ruins it."

Mary looked troubled.

"I am afraid the tea I made for you last night was very poor. I boiled it over my little gas stove."

"Ah, mademoiselle! It is de afternoon tea I am talking of," said Le Cygne adroitly. "De tea last night was excellent—very fine. It was not boiled much. But now we must try dis. I have done so much—will mademoiselle pour it?"

Mary daintily poured the two cups of tea. The movements of her hands and arms were full of grace. Le Cygne followed them with admiring looks.

"*Tiens*, I had forgotten!" he cried suddenly, and began undoing the neglected package of wafers. "Will mam'selle honor me?"

Mary took a wafer and he followed her example. They sipped their tea out of the little cups and nibbled their wafers and chatted and laughed. Mary had never tasted any tea like this, so strong and delicious. Even the fragrance of it was like that of some beautiful foreign flower.

They each tried a second cup, *à la Russe*, as Le Cygne said, with sugar and thin lemon slices. Mary did not relish hers as well, but her companion assured her she would soon acquire the taste, like the taste for olives and sour wine.

"But you do not drink wine?" said Mary. He saw the alarm in her face.

"Oh, never, mam'selle. Neither do I eat olives. Ugh! I never could acquire de liking. But I hear it said."

"I am very much afraid of all kinds of liquor," said Mary, still troubled.

"Oh, so am I," eagerly assented Le Cygne. "There is so much evil. I see it in my business always. Mam'selle knows little about business, I suppose?"

"Not much, I fear," said Mary.

"I tink all ladies should know a few tings," said Le Cygne. "How to keep accounts and how to care for their own property. I tink all ladies should keep their own property and the records of it—deeds and such tings. We do dat very generally in France."

"The doctor thinks just as you do," said Mary,

delightedly. "When we changed the deed of my little place, my mother's home in Westland, he had me go with him to the courthouse at Payson to have it recorded, just on purpose to show me how. He is so good to me. Then I keep my accounts very carefully, and send them to him every month."

Her face suddenly clouded as she thought of the gold piece she had missed that morning.

"So mam'selle has the deed to her own property," said Le Cygne, nodding approval. "That is well. It is in some safe or vault, I suppose?"

"No, I have it in my trunk. The doctor is always saying he is going to buy a little safe, now Westland is becoming so much like a city, but he has never done so. He keeps his papers in his trunk, an old thing in his room, and I kept my deed in my trunk, and when I came to Boston I brought it right along. Maybe that isn't the best way," doubtfully.

"Oh, yes. It is perfectly safe I am sure. The doctor would never permit otherwise than the most safe things. It is not like money, you know, or diamonds. The nobility, or rather the people who were in the old times noble, have much of wealth in diamonds, you know, and those are always kept in safes. But this is very different."

Le Cygne took his leave soon after, telling Mary he must give himself the pleasure of dropping in sometimes to a cup of tea. It was the custom in France—for good friends. He would not take so much time again, apologetically, but *vraiment* he must come. It was such a pleasure—like his dear mother's *salon* at home in the old days. To all of which Mary gave assent with maidenly modesty.

Le Cygne walked down the street, smiling. Two or three times he spoke aloud to himself. He did not say, "*Bon! Bon!*" He said, "Good! Good!"

Le Cygne came to see Mary frequently now. He had reformed in his hours he said, and was getting away from his business at four o'clock. He drew the line at four. He had considered mademoiselle's advice and felt that he must indeed take care of his health. Though, in truth, it was not the work, but the very heavy responsibility that was wearing upon him.

Mary, sitting at the window with her books, nearly always saw him coming. Then he would look up at her and smile and lift his hat, and she would meet him at the door, saving the tired looking woman in the rear the trouble of answering the bell. There were other visitors, too, a few. Professor Hertzog called once at the outer door to tell Mary of a change in her lesson hour, and when he caught sight of her pleasant study he stepped in for a minute. Then some of Mary's school-girl friends dropped in a few times, and more than once she had the pleasure of serving them afternoon tea and hearing their delighted comments. But this was not often—they were all very busy—and none of them happened to meet Le Cygne.

Mary found it hard to study faithfully with this other interest in her mind, but she tried earnestly and nearly succeeded. Every moment being so full, however, she gave less serious thought to the young man than she would otherwise have done. Usually she was very happy, not thinking much of the future. Sometimes, however, right in the midst of her studies, or after she had received a letter from home, a breath of

the old doubt and pain would sweep down upon her like a gust of the north wind, and for a time she would be in great distress. Forced at last by these painful moments to an effort at self analysis, she concluded the strange distress must be her conscience chiding her because she had not told the doctor; and she immediately sat down and wrote a letter home. In her desire to introduce the matter naturally she wrote at length describing her life much in detail and mentioning, quite as a matter of course, that a Mr. Le Cygne, a young man employed by the French government, had called several times. "He thinks the room very pleasant," she added, "which will please you, I know, dear Uncle Doctor. Professor Hertzog called, too, and though he didn't say anything about the room, he looked surprised, and it is either true or I fancy it is, that he hasn't been quite so savage with me since, when I can't play my lesson to suit him. When I come home Christmas I will tell you all about these things. No, I am not going to be homesick Thanksgiving. But tell Melissa she must think up some way to pack a little pumpkin pie—no, a great big pumpkin pie—in my Thanksgiving box."

There was nothing in the letter to alarm the unsuspecting doctor. On the contrary, he was much pleased. He had passed his eightieth birthday and was growing feeble.

"She's getting into society," he said to himself, complacently. "Oh, Mary'll make her way fast enough, just give her a chance."

He had no more idea of what that mysterious thing, modern society, really is than the man in the moon. And Mary—so far from touching the outermost fringe

of "society," she did not know that such a thing existed.

Mary's conscience was quite relieved by her letter, but the times of distress and doubt still recurred.

It was she who made the tea these days. She had learned how Le Cygne liked it. His calls were frequent now, and their acquaintance progressed rapidly.

"Tell me about your business," said Mary one day. "Where is your office?"

He looked at her keenly.

"In connection with the office of the French consul, on Seventh Street. But it is very quiet. The government desires that it be not known that it is buying timbers. Not one other American woman knows it, and not many men. But I tell *you*, mam'selle. I know my secret is safe with you."

"Indeed it is," said Mary, very proud of his confidence. "I will be very, very careful not to speak of it, m'sieur. But you never told me before that it was a secret. I might—"

"Ah, *ciel!* Mam'selle has not—" in evident alarm.

"Oh, no, no! I haven't mentioned it. I only meant I might have done so."

"I am very glad," was the reply. "It should not even be known that I am in America. But mam'selle inspires trust."

"But what is France strengthening her navy for? Is there going to be a war?"

"Ah, mam'selle, how can I tell you? Indeed, I think no one knows. But is it not well to be always prepared?"

But back of the modest words Mary felt sure that

he did know a great many things, that state secrets were intrusted to his keeping.

"You are young to have such great responsibilities."

"I am twenty-eight; that is not very young."

"Why, you said you were twenty-six at Westland, don't you remember? That Sunday when I gave you my address. Don't you know you said you would remember my number by it?"

"Did I?" said Le Cygne, confused. "I shall get myself into serious trouble sometime about my age. I simply cannot remember it. Sometimes it seems to me one thing, sometimes another. My father has the same weakness."

He laughed deprecatingly, but his face was flushed.

"I'm so myself, a little," said Mary. "Sometimes I think I am seventeen and sometimes nineteen. The years run into each other. Only I can remember now, when I think, because I am just of age."

"Mam'selle will pardon some reserve about the business," said Le Cygne, going hastily back to the previous topic. "Monsieur le President was most kind at our last interview just before I sailed, but he guarded me very carefully on this point. 'Tell no one,' said he. 'Not even your wife or your mother.' But, of course, I have no wife, and my *chère mère* is in Heaven."

There was the touch of sadness in his voice that always crept in when he mentioned his mother.

"Is your father living?" asked Mary.

"Yes, mam'selle, the noblest father in the whole world. He is retired. He was also in de government service. He is in our ancestral home in southern France. Our family was noble before the republic.

But France has no nobles now, or rather all our citizens are noble. Once my father was Count de le Cygne, now he is plain Monsieur de le Cygne. *Voilà*, our family seal."

He held up his hand with the seal ring glistening on his finger.

"*Cygne*—swan," said Mary. "I knew, of course, that *cygne* was 'swan' in French, but I never made the connection before."

"We do not boast of our family," said the young man, modestly. "We are true republicans."

He had never told her so much of himself before. Mary had often wondered why he never talked to her in French. She had mentioned her French lessons more than once, but her timidity prevented her from beginning to speak in French to him. But she had been struck more than once with the fact that his foreign accent was becoming less marked, while his French idioms and expletives had almost disappeared.

"Monsieur," she said, "I think you are improving very rapidly in English. You speak it almost perfectly."

The simple remark seemed strangely to have the immediate effect of making him speak it less perfectly.

"Mam'selle is vaire kind to say it. De French are a versatile people; dey have one special gift at language it is said. And I have study vaire hard."

"Are you studying now with all your work?" Mary was surprised.

"Yes, mam'selle. Every evening I have one private tutor in my rooms. Mam'selle has perhaps noticed that I come not any more in de evening? I would have one surprise for mam'selle when she hear me speak her language *parfaitement*. But now she have

found it out, I will not try always to talk it so well. It is so restful not to always try and be strained!"

Mary looked at him in admiration.

"I like not the English at first," he confessed. "I like much better de Italian and even de barbarous German. But since I hear mam'selle speak English I have learn to love it. It has new music."

Mary dropped her eyes, blushing.

Le Cygne walked down Vevey Street frowning heavily.

"Pretty close call!" he muttered. "Two breaks in one evening. If she hadn't been fresh— I must wind matters up—no use putting it off any longer. She's ripe anyway—ripe's an apple. Shake her down's the word. No risk—no risk at all."

His spirits were rising.

"But I must plan it a little. No more breaks, Jules Henri le Cygne."

As the name struck his ear he threw back his head and laughed aloud.

CHAPTER VII

IN A "MUSIC HALL"

There is a certain music hall in Boston over which during all the dusky days of November hangs the illuminated sign, "Free turkey lunch: Thanksgiving month!" The great front windows of this hall are broad, unbroken sheets of shining plate-glass. Through their polished crystal one can see bottles of liquor lying or standing on the swinging glass shelves as if suspended in midair. They are round, or square, or flask-shaped, or long or squat, piled in glowing pyramids or lying in seemingly careless heaps of beautifully contrasting color. Beyond the display of bottles one sees a bewildering vista of plate-glass mirrors glittering with color and light, and flashing with gay glimpses of the street reflected in their depths; while over all glows a richly decorated ceiling, starred with electric lights.

Enter the doors, they swing easily on their hinges. Ah, some careless fellow has dropped a gold piece on the tiled floor. Why, someone has emptied a bag of them—scattered them carelessly about. But stoop to pick one up—it is under glass and cemented fast in the floor. Break the glass if you choose. The smiling clerk behind the counter will not lift a finger to prevent you, but the moment your hand comes in contact with the precious metal you recoil, struck by an invisible hand. He who would rob the floor of these hundreds of coins must reckon with electricity.

Walking thus over gold you find yourself in the cigar room, a shallow apartment with cases at each side and richly ornamented walls. A large clock is here, a free telephone and other things to attract a convenience-seeking public. Push on and you enter a large room in which stand many small tables with chairs about them. On the walls between the panels of mirrors hang life-size pictures, some of the ideal female form, some of well-known actresses. There are also pictures of prize fighters with heroic shoulders and hardened faces. The entire rear end of the large room is raised about two feet and fitted with curtains and foot-lights. At one side of this stage is an alley-way leading back to small rooms loosely partitioned and curtained off. "For private parties," the white-aproned waiter will whisper in your ear. If he knows you pretty well he may wink.

The evening of the day of Le Cygne's last described call on Mary, he and another man sat in one of these little rooms. A table was between them on which were bottles and glasses. The men were drinking and talking.

"What the devil d'ye want of me?" at last said Le Cygne's companion. "Come, spit it out."

He was a stout, beardless man of perhaps twenty-one years of age. His face was pimpled and greasy looking, and his nose was small and flat giving him a singularly repulsive look.

"I understand she's a daisy, and well freighted, I know, or you wouldn't be so hot after her. But where's my finger coming in the pie?"

"I want you to marry us," said Le Cygne.

"Marry you? Marry! Oh, that's too blanked rich! What d'ye take me for? I ain't a justice o' the peace.

Take her up to Tom Wylke's office. He'll do it up quick and no questions asked. But say, Sloan, you'll get into trouble one of these days. How many times you ben married already?"

"Shut up, you fool, you!" hissed Le Cygne in a whisper. "These walls are paper. When I want your advice I'll ask for it."

A woman's half-stifled scream and laughter came over a partition as if to emphasize what he said.

"Well, what you monkeyin' 'round for then?" resumed Griggs in lower tones. "It was you said 'marry', first, not me."

"Well, you see, Griggs, there's got to be a form to satisfy her. She ain't like these," with a nod toward the front of the house. "I can do 'most anything with her, for she's dead mashed on me, but I can't quite come that. Besides, she's got certain papers and I can't get 'em till she thinks she's my wife."

"An' you lit on me as your man for the blanked job. I see. Neat little compliment, that. I always guessed I'd make a good parson—now I know it." And he laughed with a long, coarse haw-haw that made one think of the whinneying voice of a horse.

"Oh, blank you! Come down to business, Griggs. I lit on you because I've done you many a good turn. But there's plenty of other folks would be glad to get the job."

"All right. I don't want yer dirty work. Land me in the cooler, like's not."

"Oh, not the slightest danger. She ain't the breach-o'-promise kind of girl. She won't squeal. She'd die easy before she'd have any publicity about it."

"I do' know 'bout that. You hain't tried her, and you never know what a wench is goin' to do till she gits there."

"I tell you there's no danger, not a bit. And if there was, lightning'd hit me, not you. We're all right; that is, if you can keep your mouth shut. No letting out to the boys on this." He looked at Griggs suspiciously.

"Oh! I'm as tight as a drum. But see here, Sloan, I don't want to do it anyway."

"It's a matter of a cool fifty, though, whoever does it," persisted Le Cygne.

"Oh, you're going to pay. That's a horse of a different color. I see. There's money in the girl?"

His lips parted a little and he leaned toward Le Cygne, his face taking on a covetous look.

"I didn't say that," said Le Cygne, sullenly. "I said there'd be money in it for you if you'd do it. Come! What d'ye say?"

"But I do' know 's I can. What have I got to do?"

"Oh, hell! That's easy. It's all written out in the prayer-book. You won't have to say a word."

"Prayer-book! Have I got to pray, too?"

"No, no! Just the form," said Le Cygne, impatiently. "Just to make it perfectly easy for you. It'll be the slickest fifty you ever earned. 'Twon't take five minutes."

The man considered craftily.

"Tell ye what," said he, with an air of having made up his mind, "if I've got to pray, I can't do it for less'n a hundred. Give me a hundred and it's a go."

"You're a blank blanked wolf!" exclaimed Le Cygne, angrily. "I can't pay it. You want to get all

the money there is in the job. Where do I come in?"

"Oh, save your hot air. You'll keep your skin all right. D'ye mean to tell me you're offering me any large share for the job? Not by a long shot! Billy Sloan don't divy up that way, even with his friends. I've known the gent too long."

"Well, I'll make it seventy-five if you'll fix up the room, and get yourself up like a dominie."

"Wall, I'll do it for seventy-five, seein' it's you. Won't my room do, on Winter Street?"

"Yes, I guess so. Only get the pictures out of the way, and the chips and things. And buy a bottle of cologne or something to drown out the incense."

"When's the thing comin' off?"

"Well, I guess I can bring it about day after to-morrow. It's got to be done quick if it's done at all."

"All right. You buy a prayer-book and coach me up on what to do. I can get the room fixed up, I guess. What time o' day?"

"Oh, sometime in the evening—maybe late. I can tell better to-morrow."

Griggs looked at Le Cygne, an indescribable expression on his face. He began to chuckle. His face suggested the bottomless pit.

"Say, Sloan, can't you—couldn't you let me in on the ground floor when you get her cornered, just for old friendship's sake?"

But Le Cygne swore at him and talked of details. These settled, the men lit their cigars and began smoking and talking in a more amiable mood. The liquor had mellowed them.

"Where d'ye run across her, Sloan? Blank me, if

you ain't always jest runnin' plum into good luck," said Griggs.

"Well," replied Le Cygne, evidently flattered, "I was out at Westland again last fall, and—"

"Oh! She's a Westland girl. What's her name? Prob'ly I know her."

"I was out at Westland—I thought my health needed a change—"

"Oh! about the time of the raids. 'Twas kinder onhealthy for ye 'round here 'bout that time."

"Went out on an accommodation, and got off at that little cross-roads, you know—can't think of the name—"

"Newark?"

"Yes, Newark. And there wan't no hotel, and I had to walk to Westland."

"It's a good three mile," said Griggs. "I know that country like a book. But where does the girl come in?"

"Met her on the way. Knew her in a minute—met her once before in Westland. But I didn't care to have her know me—"

"Which ain't to be wondered at," put in the younger man.

"Blank you, Griggs, I'll break your face for you if you don't look out."

But the man only laughed the louder.

"I've got ye there," said he. "Pretty looking parson I'd be with a bunged-up eye. But call it off, old boy. I want to hear the rest of the story."

"Well, she snowballed me once, good and hard. And you, too, don't you remember? When she was a kid. It was—"

"'Tain't Mary North?"

"That's just who it is!"

Griggs threw back his head and laughed his long horse laugh.

"If that ain't too blanked good!"

He went off into another convulsion. Le Cygne laughed, too.

"What d'ye do next?" Griggs finally spluttered out.

"Well, it flashed over me all of a sudden that I'd have some fun with the girl. I'd forgotten all about her, blanked if I hadn't, till that minute. But when she just turned up, right in my way, and all-fired han'some, too—"

"I see," said Griggs. "Kind o' like a special Providence. Well?"

"It flashed over me all of a sudden that I'd try the high Parisian dodge on her. You know I can do the Frenchy on a pinch—my grandmother was a Montreal Canuck, and I picked up the fixings on the liners. Get mixed up sometimes, but she ain't a critic. Well, it worked to perfection. I'm a high-nob Parisian—a great gun. She's been studying French lately—two-horse team—so I've been studying English. All for love of her!"

The men laughed loudly.

"Blank me, if I don't try gittin' on to one of them French liners," said Griggs. "Make your way with the chips, I s'pose? But tell me about the girl."

"There ain't much to tell. She was dead mashed on me from the word go. Then I heard some gawks at the hotel talking—" he glanced keenly at his companion—"some gawks praising her up, and I thought I'd try my hand in the game a little further. The

next day was Sunday, and I went to church and got a seat close to her. Blanked religious she is, and it's becoming to her, too, on my soul. And in the afternoon, when I figured out the old folks'd be asleep I went over to see her. Found out that she was coming to Boston to study music, and the rest was easy—jest settin' in a Pullman. She's ponied up on the tickets, too," he added, chuckling with a sudden remembrance of the gold piece.

"Well, you *are* a devil!" interjected Griggs with undisguised admiration. "I guess before she gets through with it she'll wish she'd gone to hell straight, before she threw snowballs at you."

"Oh, blank ye, Griggs, 'tain't that. What d'ye take me for? Billy Sloan don't lay up grudges that way. Besides, she was nothing but a kid. It just gave me the chance to get acquainted with her, don't you see?"

"But, look a-here, Sloan, I can't do it. She'll know me, sure thing."

"She won't know you; I'll take care of that. But I guess you better rig up a little. Put on your moustache."

"All right, if you'll run the risk."

The bottles were empty. They rose and left the room, Le Cygne warning his friend that he must ride strictly in the water wagon till the job was over.

They sat down aimlessly for a few minutes in the large room which was full of men and women drinking and smoking and talking. On the stage a girl dressed in tights with a blue silk skirt so short that it was hardly more than an apology for that garment, was singing and dancing. Her face was painted and her voice strained. People paid very little attention to her.

Folks were coming and going constantly. At a table near the door sat two girls, gaudily dressed. A youth, evidently from the country, entered alone. He looked about him curiously. The older girl spoke to him at once.

"How de do?" said she. "Is this the first time you've been in here?" She knew that it was.

"Won't you buy something for us?" she added. "We're dying of thirst and dead broke. Just sit right down here."

She half pushed him into a seat. A waiter was at their side in an instant, and the girl unhesitatingly gave him an order for drinks for three, which were presently brought. The girls drank and laughed and seemed in high spirits, joking and rallying the man; but he was silent and ill at ease, drinking little. Then the older girl ordered cigars, but the man did not light his, and looked wonderingly about him.

"Greeny!" jeered the girl. She lit her own cigar, took a puff or two, then leaned forward and deftly pressed the glowing end of the cigar against the man's nose.

He sprang up with a violent oath, threw a silver dollar on the table, pulled himself away from her by brute force and rushed out of the door.

Those sitting nearest laughed and applauded the girl, whereupon she jumped to her feet and began parading with high steps down the middle aisle between the tables in the crowded room. She threw her feet out in queer motions. With one hand she held up her silken skirts, and with the other beckoned first one man, then another, as they sat looking and laughing. Finally a young fellow with a bloated face accepted

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her challenge, and taking her hand they danced together down the room.

"Tell ye," said Le Cygne, "my country posie ain't that kind."

"She'll be that kind fast enough before you're done with her," said Griggs. "But serves her right. She needn't have snowballed us." They rose and left the room.

The younger girl sat still at the table. She was not more than seventeen years old. Her face wore a shamed, piteous look.

CHAPTER VIII

ENTRAPPED

Le Cygne drank no liquor the next day. He had need of all his wits for the work before him. Even so, it was with moustache and hair carefully bathed and breath perfumed that, about eight in the evening, he presented himself at Mary's study. His face was softly sad, his manner abstracted. He accepted gladly Mary's offer of tea, for in truth he was very fond of it, but he would eat none of the wafers she offered him.

"I expect a box from home to-morrow," said Mary, happily. "It is my Thanksgiving box, you know. I wish it were here now. You could eat one of Melissa's cookies, I'm sure."

Le Cygne smiled and sipped his tea, and said he felt sure the cookies from Westland would be very fine. But perhaps she would have the goodness to offer him some later, when the box had come. To which suggestion Mary gave willing assent.

"Your kindness is like that of an angel, to make me so happy here," said he, with humble gratitude.

Mary thought of a saying she had once read: "Great minds are always humble."

"Do not speak that way. It is a pleasure to me to have you come."

"Ah! if my sainted mother were only alive! But I have written to my father about my beautiful friend in America. I hope much my honored father may see mam'selle some time."

"Is your father a member of the Protestant church, too?" asked Mary, timidly. She desired very much to know if the young man himself was a church member, having very puritanical ideas about associating with one who was not.

"Oh, yes; most certainly. In France we go by families in religion very much more than is de custom in America. My father, my mother and myself—I am de only child—we are all in de Reformed church. Mam'selle is a Metodiste, I believe? I hope that she will not think less of me because I am not a Metodiste?" anxiously.

"Oh, no! I think that would be very bigoted. The one great thing is to—to trust in the Lord Jesus."

Le Cygne dropped his eyes.

"I tink I do dat," he said vaguely. He was, for once, truly embarrassed—the language of religion was an unknown tongue to him. Mary also was embarrassed. It was not easy for her to "talk religion."

Le Cygne recovered himself and begged for music, which was given very willingly. Soon after he rose as if to go.

"So soon?" said Mary.

"Yes, mam'selle. I am not well to-night."

Mary looked at him. He seemed to be suffering. There were dark shadows under his eyes, and his face, always colorless, seemed to her paler than ever. They were standing near each other at the table, for Mary had risen, too. Suddenly, there swept into her tender heart a great surge of pity for the "homeless foreigner." He stood a moment as if irresolute, then looked at her hungrily, passionately. Gradually he leaned toward her, his burning eyes still fixed on hers.

Mary's heart began to beat heavily—she could not turn away. Then he put out his arms and, with movements whose very slowness seemed but to increase their irresistibleness, drew her to his breast. He laid her unresisting head on his shoulder and arm and kissed her long on her lips. She involuntarily closed her eyes. A strange influence was upon her. She breathed heavily and did not move. He murmured in her ear sweeter things than she had ever dreamed of—"*Mon ange! Ma coeur!* My precious little one!"—kissing her again and again in seeming oblivion of everything but her.

"But do you not love me a little?" he asked at last. Then, as Mary did not speak: "Ah! my heart tells me that you do. My kisses, these arms—they would not be endurable to you if there were not true love for me in your heart."

Mary still did not resist. She felt like one in the paralysis of a half dream. Yet in the midst of the numbness there was a welter of many things in her mind—scraps of strange ideas, uncompleted bits of reasonings, dim memories—tangled together like threads in a disordered work-basket. Was this love? What would the doctor say? Ah! there was the "ancestral home" shimmering before her closed eyes. And there—Stephen's face—dim—distant! Oh! He was in Germany. It was all so confused, and there was pain with the joy. Did all girls feel so at first?

Still she did not move.

Suddenly he released her a little and a look of keen distress crossed his face.

"Alas, mam'selle!" he groaned. "What have I done? You do not speak! You will not forgive me!

I have distressed my little one! I had better have died. I should have waited. I should have asked permission of the good doctor, the guardian. But, oh, *ma cherie*, I was carried away by the torrent of my great love for you! Can you not forgive me, and love me a little, Marie—Marie?"

Mary opened her eyes and looked at him confusedly.

"Cannot my little one forgive me?"

"I—I—there is nothing to forgive."

It was enough. He caught her again in his arms with many caresses. But she began to cry softly.

"My darling is weeping," said Le Cygne, again in great distress. "I have frightened my little bird. I am greatly to be blamed. What shall I do?"

"It is nothing," said Mary, trying to rally. "I am very happy. Don't mind my crying."

He led her over to the little sofa, and, sitting by her, wiped her tears with his handkerchief—a new one which he had bought for a possible emergency. He kept murmuring in her ears the sweet, loving names, sometimes in French, sometimes in English, and gradually she was calmed and cheered.

"Ah! Now I can live that you smile again, my own love. Can I believe the wonderful thing that you love me? Will you say the very words—'I love you?'"

Mary said the words after him.

"Call me Jules, *cherie*. No one has called me Jules since my mother went to Heaven."

"Jules," whispered Mary.

Suddenly she raised her head with at last one clear thought in her brain.

"Why, what does your father call you?'

"Ah, the practical little body! *Monsieur mon père*, he calls me Henri."

He pronounced it Hong-ree. It struck Mary that the pronunciation was a little singular. Her French teacher had corrected her more than once for overdoing the "g" in the soft French nasal. But it was of course a peculiarity of his father's.

"I must write to uncle and auntie," presently said Mary. And as she thought of them a shadow of the old distress fell darkly upon her.

"Oh, do not write. We will go—we will both go and tell them. I must go at once and make my apologies for not speaking to the doctor first. Do you think that he will give his consent, darling?"

"I am very sure that he will."

"*Bien!* We will go to-morrow. No, I cannot at all leave to-morrow. There is my duty first, and the affairs at the office are very trying just now."

He stopped, considering.

"I can't go to-morrow either," said Mary. "And it would frighten them, too, if we were to go suddenly. Oh, I have it! Why not wait till the Christmas vacation? I'm going home anyway then, and you can go with me. It won't be long."

"And you will not need to write about it?"

"No; if you would rather I did not. But I have told them already that you sometimes came to see me."

"Ah, that was well—most natural. But for my honor I must first tell them, with my profound apology. And if he gives you to me—such a treasure—then can we be married very soon?"

Mary blushed deeply. Her thoughts were clearing

up. Marriage! The painful feeling was upon her again.

"I had expected to go to college."

"But I am so lonely. And in Paris one can study the very best—music and art and all de languages. I have riches, my darling. I have position. I can give my wife everything. Or if my little one prefers, I will resign my work and we will live in the sunny south-land, in the castle of my forefathers. My father is lonely for his only son. Or we will travel. It shall be just as you say, my queen. But I will not urge for an answer to-night. My darling must have time to think."

"It is all so new and strange. Yes, I must have time to think."

"And in the meantime will my little industrious one go on with her studies?"

"Don't you think I had better?"

"Just as you like. Only I must come every day now. Ah, how long will the day be till I can see my dear one's face!"

Many more things did Le Cygne pour into Mary's ears. He could talk well. She found herself gradually drawn into all his glowing plans—yielding to the spell of the rosy future he pictured before her.

It was late when he went away. She shut the door upon him and drew a long breath of shuddering happiness. Could it be real? Was it not some wonderful dream? Did this great, grand man—and he was good, too, a member of the church—did this noble man really love her? Was she going to marry him—oh, but by and by, not yet awhile—and go to live in the "castle of his forefathers"? It was too wonder-

ful. She remembered her girlish fancies of the English lord. But this French gentleman, this trusted government employeé—this was infinitely better. She wished she had asked him more about his father's family—the servants—the castle itself. She believed she would decide to live there—at least a part of the year. Only Jules must not give up his government work for her sake. She would never let her wishes stand in the way of his advancement. How wonderful that so young a man should really know the president of France! It was as if she knew the great president, at Washington. How unconcernedly he had spoken of his interview with the president! But she must spend a part of every year in dear Westland. Uncle Doctor must not quite lose his girl. And Stephen—would he be pleased? She did not know.

She read her chapter in course that night, and knelt by her bed to pray. With shaking sobs she poured out her heart before the Lord. She thought she was wholly happy. She felt flashes of anxious distress, sharp as a knife-thrust once in a while, but she had read of happiness so keen that it was like pain.

It was late the next evening when Le Cygne presented himself. Mary, who had been growing anxious, flew joyfully to the door to meet him. Her Thanksgiving box had come, full of delightful surprises. She had been very busy, planning, among other things, to have her lover come the next day to dinner. Surely it would be proper now; and, with a queer little outcropping of New England pride, she wanted to show him she could give him a good "meal of victuals," though, after all, she supposed she would not have

housekeeping to do. All great ladies had housekeepers.

But the first glimpse of Le Cygne's face instantly drove all these happy thoughts out of her mind. He seemed deeply agitated. He held in his hand a yellow envelope, sealed but torn across the end; and when he put his arm about Mary she could feel that he was trembling.

"What is the matter? Has anything happened?" cried she.

"Oh, *ma coeur!* A distressing thing! I am cabled home—to France! I must leave to-morrow. The good ship *L'Esperance* sails at three o'clock."

Mary's face paled. She could not speak.

"My little flower—my darling, how can I go! How can I be separated from you, my own treasure, my very life!"

He dropped on the sofa and buried his face in his hands.

"It will kill me! It will break my heart!" he moaned. He stretched out his arms to her. His hair was disarranged, his face convulsed with emotion.

Mary was greatly alarmed.

"But it will not be for long," she gasped. "You will come back soon?"

"Oh, yes, yes! I will come back—if I live. I will fly to my darling the moment I can. But, the cruel ocean between us! It may be some time—I cannot tell—and I may die. It is my duty to the government—my country. I must be true to it. My duty must come first, though I die in the loneliness and separation."

Mary began to cry silently.

"You weep, my love. It is consoling to me. But no, it is I who cause the pain."

There were sorrowful kisses and lovers' words.

'Marie! Marie!" cried Le Cygne, suddenly, a light breaking over his face as if a new idea had just come to him. "Come with me, oh, my life! I cannot leave you behind—it will tear in two my heart. Come with me as my bride—my little wife. We can be married to-night. I have a good minister friend, near the French consulate—on Winter Street. It will be perfectly easy."

Mary shrank back as if struck.

"Oh, I cannot!" she cried.

The agonized look returned to Le Cygne's face.

"Pardon me. I think I am too bold, but it is my great love. I am asking too great a gift from my love. It is too great a sacrifice."

"No, no! But—" She hesitated, in great distress.

"Yes, it is too great. I must not ask you to do it for me, though I would so joyfully lay down my life for you. I would do anything for you, Marie."

"Oh, Jules!" cried Mary. "I would do anything for you, too. You know I would."

"Come with me then, *mon ange*. Will you not come with me?"

"If I only knew what was right," sobbed the girl, in greatest perplexity.

"Why is not this right?" urged Le Cygne. His acting was consummate. He threw himself into the matter so intensely that for the moment he seemed, even to himself, to be pleading for a truly just cause. "Is it not right to give me happiness?—perhaps my very life? Can you not trust my judgment? Marie,

cherie, I cannot go alone—it will kill me. I plead with you. I need you for my little nurse. I have no mother—no one to care for me."

All Mary's womanly nature was aroused. It was true—she knew that he was not well. If he should sicken and die she would have killed him. The thought smote her. Still, her deeper instincts held her back—her maidenly reserve and something else that she did not understand. The contest in her mind was severe.

"I don't know what to do," she moaned. "Oh, Jules, I am afraid."

"Afraid?" said he, with tender reproach. "Do you doubt my love? Oh, *cherie*, come with me."

Still she hesitated.

"If I could only see Uncle Doctor," she cried piteously.

"Oh, yes; that would be best. But there is not time," he replied.

"Could I not telegraph?"

He looked thoughtful

"Would it not alarm him? He is not like us, accustomed to telegrams. He is an old man."

Mary saw that his reasoning was good.

"Would it not be better to write him?" he pursued. "He knows about me already. And I will myself write. There are many things to do, but there will be time—we will take the time. It is not necessary to sleep to-night. I will write him, and I will have the French consul write, too, to-morrow. For, of course, your uncle will want to know my standing in my government and my ability to care properly for my wife;"—he said the words proudly—"then, when we

are on the good ship, sailing, sailing to my beautiful country"—his voice fell rhythmically on Mary's ears—"we will write him long letters. We will tell him all about it—our great love and the sudden call of duty. Surely he will forgive us. Will you come, Marie, *cherie?* Will you say the little word, 'yes'?"

Again he fixed on her that intent gaze—steady, yet his eyes seemed to glitter upon her. Her own, wide open, were fascinated by them. Very gradually, with the gentlest movements, he drew her down against his bosom, never withdrawing his eyes nor ceasing the rhythmic murmurings:

"One little word, Marie, one little word, *cherie.* Will not my darling say the one little word, to give me the joy of my life, Marie?"

There was silence for a moment, then Le Cygne said, with a thrill of solemnity that carried conviction to Mary's tender heart, "It is my life sentence, Marie. I am not well. I have a presentiment that unless you go with me I shall never—but I must not tell it! But, oh, Marie, do you not trust me? Let me die now, if you do not trust me."

"Oh, yes, yes. You know I do."

"Well, then, it is my life I ask from you."

How pale the face was out of which the great dark eyes were shining into Mary's! A great pity drew her on. She must save him—she would, she would! What if it were not the usual thing for girls to do! What if people did not understand! Women must sacrifice themselves. It was woman's lot—she had read it, she knew it. A woman must give herself wholly to the man she loves. And with one great act of supreme self-surrender Mary gave herself wholly.

With the decision, though still unspoken, there came over Mary a great quiet. In contrast to the storm and stress through which she had passed it seemed like joy, and Mary, with mystical readiness, took it for a sign that she was right. Then gradually, as the eyes of the man and woman were locked in a long gaze, the old trance-like feeling came over the girl. The world seemed to flee away from her. She was nothing but a soul swinging off into beautiful space—nothing real but her love and her lover, whose soft droning voice pulsed on:

"One little word, yes, Marie—one little word yes, *cherie*. Will not my darling say the little word 'yes'?"

"Yes."

Mary said it with stiffened lips. She was so guileless, so unsuspecting, so full of sweet girl romance, so swept by a woman's mighty pity, so unconsciously open to all that strong natural influence one dominating sex may have over the innocent other. Her soul lay at the mercy of this fiend in human form, and found no mercy there.

Le Cygne perceived that he had conquered, and for a moment a fierce thrill of animal triumph shook his whole frame—that, at any rate, was real. What was the use of further pains? What need of a marriage ceremony? But his caution conquered. He was indeed master now, but she was a great prude. And that deed—he must run no risk!

"Yes, yes," he echoed. "How happy you make me—a happiness like Heaven. And are not you happy, too, *mon ange?* Yes, we will be married. We will write a letter to the dear uncle—Marie will write, and I will write—and then we will go to my friend, the

minister, and we will be married. Sit here at the desk, Marie. Here is the pen and paper."

Mary wrote briefly, he suggesting the thoughts and almost the words. He sealed the letter and put it in his pocket. She sat passive, waiting the next suggestion. She had surrendered, utterly.

"Now put on your cloak and hat, Marie, and we will go."

She obeyed and they passed out, the spring lock clicking behind them. It was late and they met few people. They soon came to a cab stand, and Le Cygne put Mary into a carriage.

"Drive rapidly," he said to the man on the box, slipping a half dollar into his hand as he gave him an address.

It was not a long ride, and Mary hardly spoke, for her mental attitude of absolute self-surrender did not change. Le Cygne's soft utterances never ceased. The cab stopped, and he gently took her out and supported her to a house.

"Wait," he called back to the cabman.

The man touched his hat obsequiously. But he caught a glimpse of Mary's pure white face, noted the character of the street and house, and muttered under his breath:

"Shure, an' it's a blanked shame!"

He ground his teeth and swore softly over and over. He even looked up and down the street in a vague way, thinking of a policeman, but none was in sight. He shook himself uncomfortably as if to shake off any responsibility that might possibly attach to him concerning the matter.

"B' gorry!" said he finally, "it's none o' my busi-

ness. I can't stop it. It's only the one, to-night—it's goin' on all the time."

The horse twisted his head and looked round at him, the harness rattling. The big brown eyes stared at him in the gaslight. The dumb thing seemed to reproach him.

The man pulled the reins up sharply.

"What the divil can I do?" he muttered, impatiently. "A har-rud workin' man with the wife an' four childer. An' the little one this verra mornin'! It's a good fare an' I ear-runed it honest."

In a little while the couple reappeared.

"To the Merodack Hotel, driver," said Le Cygne.

"All r-right, sor," said the man, touching his cap.

CHAPTER IX

STRANGE WAYS

Mary was wan and haggard when she wakened the next morning, with a lassitude strange to the healthy girl. She was quite recovered from the abnormal influence dominating her the night before, but she was intensely excited, and depressed at the changes that had come to her. Le Cygne soothed her as best he could. By and by she tried to rise, but the room whirled about her, and she sank back again on her pillow in deathly faintness. The man was alarmed.

"What's the matter?" said he sharply.

"I don't know," replied Mary piteously.

"I'll get you some whisky." He pushed the bell knob. "Then you'll feel better."

"Whisky!" Her horrified toned warned Le Cygne.

"Just for medicine, my darling," said he soothingly. "I never use it for anything else, but the doctors all use it for medicine. I'm frightened about you, darling. I don't feel well myself either. Yesterday was a hard day for us both."

Mary thought he did look ill, and she herself was too wretched in mind and body to demur further So the whisky came, with accompaniments of hot water and sugar. Le Cygne prepared a glass with the skill of an adept, and held it to Mary's lips. She drank it mechanically. Then, turning his back to her, he prepared a second glass and drank it himself. Sure enough Mary soon felt better.

"Was it not pleasant, Marie—the wedding?"

"Y-yes," replied the girl hesitatingly. The tears filled her eyes as a vision rose before her of what in the old happy days she had sometimes dreamed her wedding might be—in the dear old church at home, with flowers and sunshine. She put the thoughts away resolutely.

"I'm glad we wrote the letter to the doctor, telling him of the emergency."

"Oh, yes, we did write."

Pretty soon she asked thoughtfully, "What was his name, Jules? Your friend's—the man who—who married us?"

"Reverend Samuel Hopkins," replied Le Cygne, with prompt invention.

"What church is he pastor of?" pursued Mary.

"South End Methodist."

"South End Methodist? I never heard of that church. I'd like to go and call on Mr. Hopkins."

"Oh, we won't have time before we sail, but we'll do it, sure, when we come back. And you can write to him, you know, from the ship, if you like, and mail it as soon as we land in Paris."

"We do not land directly in Paris, do we? I thought Paris was inland."

"So it is, of course. We land at Havre. But we run right up to Paris by a special train that meets the steamer, so it's the same thing."

Suddenly Mary faced him with a startled look.

"Where is the marriage certificate?" said she.

"My G—gracious!" exclaimed Le Cygne. "How you scared me. I forgot it. Excuse me, my dear. I had so many things on my mind."

"Oh! Can't you get it yet? Can't you go and get it while I run to my rooms and pack my satchel? It seems to me I can't go without it. Just think, dear. Mr. Hopkins might die before we come back."

"We'll be back within three months."

"You said it might perhaps be some time."

Le Cygne took a moment to consider.

"Please, dear," said Mary timidly.

He seemed to reach a decision. He leaned over and kissed her, bringing a flush to her troubled face.

"Yes, Marie, *cherie*, since you want it so badly, I think I can manage it. He might send it to us, but I'll make sure. Anything to make you happy, *ma petite*. But you mustn't go out without me—there'll be time for all. I'll just jump into a cab while you're finishing your toilet, and I won't be gone fifteen minutes. Then we'll go together to your rooms."

"And we must tell Mrs. Clark, and—why, what shall we do about my things, Jules? There won't be time to pack them to send home."

"Oh, just let them stay as they are; they'll be all right. Good idea, indeed, for when we come back we may want them."

"But the rent?"

Le Cygne laughed heartily.

"Leave that to me, *cherie*—such a trifle! Now I'll go. You won't leave the room? Promise me you won't leave the room till I get back. I'm afraid something might happen to you, *ma petite*. I'll not be gone fifteen minutes. Promise me, dear. I can't be easy till I know my treasure will be safe."

Mary promised, with heart swelling at this tender

compulsion of love, and with a caress Le Cygne hastened away.

The little interval gave Mary a moment for thought, and the horror fell darkly over her. How strange it was and how sudden! Was it not unwomanly? How hard it would be to make the folks at home understand it! But it was done—she was married, and there was no use in worrying about it. After all, Jules needed her. That was a sufficient answer to any possible criticism. Was any sacrifice too great for love? So she tried to reason herself into quiet and happiness.

Rousing at last, she looked about for a Bible. Ever since her conversion it had been her custom to read a little in the Bible and spend a time in prayer the first thing in the morning. She found no Bible in the somewhat bare room, but she turned to the bed and was about to kneel beside it when a sense of its disorder struck her. She arranged it very neatly, and then tidied up the room, not knowing, in her simplicity, that such care was not ordinarily given by hotel guests. Suddenly she remembered that it was Thanksgiving Day. And her box—must she leave it? At least she would take with her the molasses candy and the little package of butternut meats. She closed her eyes a moment and choked as she saw Ira with a flat-iron between his knees and his face all twisted, hammering away at the tough shells, with Melissa seated at his side picking out the meats. Oh, what were the folks doing at home? Well, she would have her prayers.

So she knelt by the bed. Never had her soul been so drawn out to God. Thoughts of her mother came to her. Other thoughts—the sweetest and most sol-

emn that a married woman can have. She wished she could remember her father. She wondered, with a passion of remorseful tears, why she had not asked Jules to stay and have prayers with her. She prayed earnestly for him and for herself. She thanked God, with tears that she thought came from a fountain of pure joy, for the wonderful gift, the undeserved happiness that had so strangely come into her life; and asked earnestly for strength and grace to meet her new duties. She arose comforted and strengthened.

It was nearly an hour before Le Cygne's return. She sprang joyfully to meet him. She was her old self again.

"Did you get it?" she cried eagerly.

"Hopkins will send it to us at the boat to-morrow. He couldn't get the witnesses' names before, but he'll have it at the boat sure. I told him my little wife would cry her eyes out if he didn't."

He pinched her cheek.

"But—to-morrow!" gasped Mary. "I thought the boat was going to-day."

"I thought so, too, my darling. But I—they have postponed it—the engine is out of order, or something of that kind. I just called at the office and found it out."

"Oh! If we had only known it we might almost have gone home, up to Westland. And Thanksgiving Day, too."

"So we might, but we didn't know it. And, after all, it may be best as it is. It would have startled them very much, and maybe they wouldn't have let you go with me, Marie, *cherie*."

Mary turned away. A wave of desperate homesickness struck her.

"Now we shall have plenty of time," continued Le Cygne, blind and cheerful. "You can write a long letter to your folks explaining all about it. But first of all, let's have breakfast. I'll just have it brought up here. It'll save the trouble of going out, and will be nice and cozy."

He rang the bell. Then noting Mary's face still troubled, he said tenderly:

"Won't that please you, darling, to have breakfast all by ourselves, where folks won't be looking at us?"

"Oh, yes, indeed," replied Mary, smiling bravely at him.

"Who made up the bed?" asked he, suddenly, noticing the order of the room. "Has the chambermaid been in?"

"No," said Mary, proudly. "I did it myself."

An amused smile came over Le Cygne's face.

"Why, what a little Puritan!" he said.

Mary blushed in uncertainty. She did not know whether he meant it for a compliment or not.

"But don't you think it makes it nicer for our breakfast?" she ventured.

"Oh, yes," he said kindly, and followed it up by the old winning ways, so that her heart was again in a glow of happiness and contentment.

They had a very happy breakfast. Le Cygne asked Mary to order the food, telling her it was the duty of *la madame* in all French households. But when she hardly knew what to choose, he helped her out by suggesting this and that. Mary could eat but little, but Le Cygne swallowed his food with very evident animal relish. Mary noticed, hardly defining it in her mind, but feeling its unpleasantness, a little lack of

the delicacy of the tea-drinking out of the dainty cups in her study. Le Cygne talked most entertainingly, quite as Mary had grown accustomed to having him do, but with a Yankee accent so undeniable that she finally remarked it.

"Do you know, Jules, it is the queerest thing in the world that you have learned English so wonderfully. Sometimes you speak it so perfectly that one would hardly know you were a foreigner. It is really remarkable." She looked at him admiringly.

"It did not come without work," said Le Cygne. "Ah, the study! But I am rewarded, *cherie*, in that you appreciate it so very much."

"But I sometimes wish you would talk French. I love it dearly, and I want very much to learn it. I am so slow—not like you, darling. I'm afraid you'll be ashamed of your ignorant little wife some day."

But Le Cygne comforted her—in English—and flattered her delicately, as he knew so well how to do, loitering over this and that. Mary asked once if it was not time to go, and again she wondered whether there wouldn't be time now to go and call on Mr. Hopkins, and see about the certificate. But Le Cygne reassured her about the first matter and coaxed her out of the second. Would anyone be alarmed about her not being at her rooms? To which Mary answered that nobody noticed her goings and comings. *Bien*, then, it was their first day of married life, he said, in that pleading way of his, and now since by good luck the boat did not go that day, why not rest easy and enjoy themselves? There was time enough yet. Besides neither of them was well—they must rest all

they could. And there were so many things they had to say to each other.

The idea came to Mary once that it would be pleasant to go back to her rooms for a real Thanksgiving dinner—there were so many goodies in the box—but Le Cygne would not listen to it.

"What! Cook my food? My wife do that menial work? Never!" he declared, with fine indignation.

So Mary gave up the idea a little sorrowfully.

After a late and elaborate lunch, which Mary would have called dinner, they finally set out in a cab to go back to Mary's rooms. It was only for the errands, as Le Cygne had insisted on keeping the room at the hotel till they sailed.

"It's a poor little home to take my bride to," he had said, "a shabby hotel room. But the groom in France always takes his bride to his home."

The hotel had seemed very fine to Mary. It was the first time in her life she had ever been in one.

As they entered the cab Mary noticed curiously that her companion drew down all the silken curtains till they were quite shut in. The idea floated through her mind that probably this was a French custom also. She had heard that the nobility were exclusive.

"Shall we go around by the steamship office?" said Le Cygne. "It can do no harm, and we will inquire again about the boat."

Mary gladly assented and they drove to an imposing office building. Le Cygne jumped from the cab and, telling Mary to wait for him, disappeared in the building. The street was remarkably quiet.

"I suppose the steamship office is back in the building," said Mary to herself. She had timidly raised a

curtain, thinking the sign of the company might be visible in the windows; but she did not find it. The building looked deserted. She suddenly remembered that it was Thanksgiving—a holiday. She feared the office might be closed. Le Cygne soon returned.

"What's the matter? Are they not open?"

"Yes, but—" He was silent, with drawn brows.

"I thought perhaps you had forgotten that we always keep our Thanksgiving as a holiday," said Mary, timidly.

"Oh, but steamship offices are always open, even on holidays. They have to be, don't you see? But—"

"Don't the boat go to-morrow?"

"Yes, but—it is very awkward—I—I hate to tell even you, Marie."

"Why, tell me of course," said Mary eagerly.

"*Bien!* I never thought of it till this minute. But you know, my darling, that I engaged my stateroom on the boat as I was on the way to see you last night. It was necessary to engage it at the first moment, you know, so as to be sure of it."

"And it is not large enough for both of us?" said Mary, breathlessly.

"Oh, yes it is—it is not that. It is one of the largest in the boat. I always take the best. But I never thought of more than one going—though you know, my darling, how happy you make me by going with me—and I have not reserved money enough to pay for the two tickets. You know, Marie, the marriage fee alone was a fifty."

Mary had not known, but she accepted the statement implicitly.

"How much do you need, Jules?" said she.

"Only seventy-five dollars—the merest trifle. How could I be so careless?"

"I wish I had the money," said Mary wistfully. "But I've only a little in my purse."

He looked at her in astonishment.

"My darling, my angel, do you think I would take your precious little money? A Le Cygne borrowing of his bride? Never!"

He sat in deep thought.

"Can't you get it at the French consul's?" suggested Mary.

"Ah, I was just this moment thinking of that. Yes, I can do that in an emergency. He will give it to me instantly, but I hate to ask. It's very unbusinesslike, you know, Marie, for a man to be caught short of money. I don't mind the consul's knowing it, of course, for he's only an inferior officer. But it might get out in Paris—the president might hear of it, and it might do me a great deal of harm."

Another few minutes of profound thought.

"I'll have to do it, though," he concluded. "We must run the risk. I've a little piece of timber land up in Maine that I bought myself. It was cheap, and I took a fancy to it—just a few hundred acres. I could raise the money on that if I had the deed, but I was foolish enough to send the deed home. I wanted my father to see it."

"Oh, oh?" cried Mary, clapping her hands. "I have it, Jules; I'm so glad! I have the deed to my land here with me in my trunk, you know. Take that, dear—you surely will. I insist upon it. I want it to be so."

Le Cygne gazed at her for a moment, as if he could hardly grasp her idea. Then he caught her hand and covered it with kisses.

"*Mon ange! Mon coeur! Ma chère petite!*" he cried. "Was there ever a woman like you? Who but your own noble self would have thought of such a sacrifice? Yes, I will do it—it is providential. It will be but a form, *cherie.* One can always easily borrow money on a deed. But the moment we set foot in Paris—the very moment—I will cable over the money so the deed will be yours again."

"I don't want it," said Mary, glowing with happiness, "unless you'd feel better about it."

Le Cygne said of course he'd feel better about it—indeed, he must do it. Then in joyful excitement he opened the carriage door and ordered the driver to go to Mrs. Clark's.

Mary's rooms were just as they had left them. As Mary stepped inside another of those waves of homesickness and pain struck her, but she battled against it. She hastened to her trunk in the other room, brought forth the deed from its safe corner and handed it to Le Cygne with a bright smile.

"*Merci! Merci!*" cried he rapturously. "A tousand tanks! You are my good angel, Marie. Is it not an auspicious beginning that our interests are so quickly one—that so beautifully a way is found out of our first little difficulty?"

He put the deed into his pocket.

"*Bien!* Will you now pack your satchel while I attend to the last business? But, no. I cannot bear to be separated from my precious one, even one little moment. Let me help you with the satchel, and

then you shall help me with my business. Is it not best?"

So they packed Mary's satchel, which was not large, laughing much at this and that. In a loving dominance over her, Le Cygne would not let her put in many things.

"But I shall surely need this," Mary, would say, holding up something.

"No, Marie, not at all. You know I have been across many times."

"How many times, Jules?" asked Mary, admiringly.

"Let me see. Six—yes, eight times, already," said Le Cygne in a very matter-of-fact way. And for once he spoke the truth.

At last the satchel was packed—Mary's Bible and the candy and box of butternuts not being forgotten—and the rooms were put in order again.

"Now, I must tell Mrs. Clark," said Mary, "and give her the keys and ask her to take care of the food." She looked at the dear box from home, half regretfully. "How the children will enjoy the things!" She smiled at the thought.

"Wait a minute," said Le Cygne, pulling her down on his lap. "Marie, I've been thinking that if you tell Mrs. Clark there may be a scene. We wouldn't like that."

'Not a bit of it," laughed Mary happily. "You don't know Mrs. Clark. All in the world she cares for is the rent regularly. She'd just as soon I was not in the rooms—rather, I guess, because then I wouldn't be wearing out her carpets. These carpets here the doctor bought," looking lovingly at the rugs.

"But how about the rent?" said Le Cygne, catching

at the suggestion. "Ought we not to pay it in advance?"

"I suppose so, I always do—a month at a time."

"But I can't pay it now, you know. Would not that be mortifying? *Voilà*, Marie, we will write her a letter from the hotel and enclose the whole amount in it, for the three months. I shall have it then, you know. We will send the keys, too, and tell her the children can have the box."

This plan was finally agreed upon. Indeed it seemed the only possible thing.

Now they were to go.

Mary took a long look about the room—the piano, the desk, the table with its little afternoon tea service still standing in perfect order. A lump rose in her throat, but Le Cygne hurried her away.

At the door he looked up and down the street, but the cab was gone. He seemed very impatient about it, and apologized to Mary for permitting her dear little feet to touch the ground, in a way that implied some sort of magnificent conveyance as the proper thing. A splendid coach and four rose in Mary's imagination, with liveried driver and footman, and silver harness-buckles. She had seen such on Boston avenues.

When they reached the familiar cab-stand Le Cygne handed Mary into a carriage, put her satchel in, parleyed a moment with the driver, then put his foot on the step and talked in at the open door.

"I think I'll send you to the hotel alone," he said. "It's perfectly safe. I've paid the man. You see, dear, I must attend to the business. Go right to the room—here's the key—and I'll come in an hour or two."

Mary was literally dumb with surprise, but, not waiting for an answer, Le Cygne walked away. She saw him enter a cab, then lost sight of him as her own carriage turned away. A pang struck through her. He had said that she should help him with his business! She groped about in her mind for some explanation. Oh, he had forgotten all about it, just as he forgot about the marriage certificate. That *must* be it —gentlemen of the nobility often forgot, she believed. There flashed across her mind a funny story of how Sir Isaac Newton once forgot to put on one of his socks, and she felt much relieved. Then it came to her mind how she had been able to help Le Cygne in the money matter, and the smile returned to her lips. It is literally true, just as it is true that two and two make four, that there is no such genuine, unalloyed happiness in any earthly act as in doing a kindness to some one.

Mary waited an hour—two—for Le Cygne's return. Then he came, in buoyant spirits, chattering French and English. "Now all is done," he said, "save a little legal form in the morning—a matter of five minutes—and buying the tickets."

The winter day was gone and darkness had fallen.

"Let's go and get some supper," he suggested. "I'm hungry."

They went out. There was no mention of cab, which really pleased Mary, for she secretly thought it a little extravagant to pay so much for carriage hire when walking was so easy and street cars so convenient.

After a short walk they left the sidewalk, and, going down a flight of marble steps on which were the muddy tracks of many feet, they found themselves in

a large room, whose walls of mirrors made it seem immensely larger. It was crowded with men and women, sitting at small tables. Waiters carrying trays were gliding here and there. At one side in a little arched recess sat three girls, framed in by the foliage of vines trained over the arch. One of the girls had a guitar, one a mandolin, and the third a small brass horn, and they were giving the Thanksgiving Day concert advertised on the *menu*. Mary glanced at them once, and dropped her eyes with a vivid blush. Their corsages were cut away very low, and their arms were entirely bare, with only tiny bands of ribbon or lace over the shoulders in place of sleeves. Mary had never before seen such toilets. She wanted to go to the girls and tell them how very far down from their shoulders their gowns had slipped, but she could not gather courage. She was ashamed even to call Jules' attention to it, but it made her very uncomfortable.

Le Cygne, quite at home, pushed his way to a vacant table. It was he this time, not Mary, who chose the food. He ordered an elaborate dinner, with several highly seasoned dishes that Mary had never before heard of. Among the "relishes" on the list he asked for olives.

"Why, I thought you didn't like olives," said Mary, in surprise. "You said so once, don't you remember?"

"This is a different kind of olives," said Le Cygne readily.

At the close of the meal Le Cygne ordered wine. Mary looked at him in speechless alarm. She could hardly believe her ears.

"Nonsense, Marie. Don't be a prude. It's only as a medicine. We use it a great deal in Paris as a medi-

cine. You must have a glass, too, my dear. Didn't it help you this morning? You are not well either. Really, *cherie*, the doctors use it all the time. Don't your uncle prescribe it?"

Mary knew that he did sometimes, and the knowledge allayed her uneasiness. Still she would not taste it herself, declaring she was quite well. Whereupon Le Cygne drank it all.

"It's just like water, this light wine," said he, reassuringly. "It would be a shame to waste it."

Returning to their room in the hotel, Le Cygne rang for writing materials, and Mary sat down to her letters. It was not quite easy to begin. She toyed with her pen.

"You didn't forget to mail the letter we wrote last night, dear?" she asked. She had heard that forgetful men were always particularly weak about their wives' letters.

"No, I mailed it all right," answered Le Cygne, from the depths of his newspaper.

Mary wrote to the doctor and his wife at great length, as she could not remember what she had written the evening before. She dwelt much on her happiness, the goodness and greatness of her husband and the shortness of the time they were to be gone. "We can't come home for Christmas, but Jules says we'll surely be back in the early spring And I'll write every mail."

She was glad when the letter was finished, and that Le Cygne, behind his paper, had not noticed that she had cried a little. To be married and to go away from home was hard, a little hard, no matter how happy one was.

Then came the shorter, easier letters to Professor Hertzog and to Mrs. Clark.

"Jules," said she, as she finished the last one, "What shall we do about the keys and the money?"

"Why, send them in the letter, of course."

"But it isn't safe, is it? Besides, one key won't go in. And I'm afraid this other will break the envelope. Then, Jules, you haven't the money yet, you know."

"That's so. Well, we'll send the keys without the money. Just add a postscript to Mrs. Clark's letter, telling her we'll send the money to-morrow."

Mary did as he desired.

"Now, give the letters all to me, and I'll go down to the hotel office and mail them. I'll send the keys in a registered package. That will be safe."

"I thought you had to go to the postoffice to send registered mail," said Mary.

"That shows you don't know how many conveniences a hotel has," replied Le Cygne. And he went away with them.

While he was gone Mary thought again of prayers. She must speak to him about them. Oh! why didn't he speak first about it—she thought that was the way Christian husbands did. But she must not put it off, though it was unexpectedly hard. She got her Bible from the satchel, but it was half an hour before Le Cygne returned.

"Jules, dear," said Mary, rising to meet him. She would not delay lest her courage fail. "Don't you think we ought to begin our married life by—by setting up our family altar?"

It was the phrase that Mary had always heard used, but he looked at her uncomprehendingly.

"By—by having devotions—praying together?" she explained desperately, lifting a pleading face to him.

A gesture of impatience interrupted her.

"Oh, not to-night, Saintie; I'm too deadly tired."

He resumed his seat and his paper. Mary stood irresolute a moment, but his manner was so decided that she dared not urge. Crushing back her disappointment as well as she could, she read her chapter and knelt alone by the bed, where she could cry it out before the Lord, trying hard meanwhile not to make any noise about the matter. Foreigners were different, she perceived. There were going to be some difficulties even in her beautiful life. Yet Jules *was* religious. She had seen him, she reminded herself—she had seen him bow his head in prayer that Sunday morning long ago, in Westland. She must be reasonable—must make allowances for the different customs of the members of the *Église Reformée*. He would surely come to her ways of life soon. Only she must be patient.

The next day, after breakfast, Le Cygne took Mary again in a cab to the office of a notary public where she signed a legal paper placing, as she supposed, a mortgage upon her Westland property. It was easy for Le Cygne to manage so that she did not see the contents of the paper at all. She answered the notary's perfunctory questions and trustfully wrote her name, "Mary North," in the space he indicated. Le Cygne had told her that her maiden name must be used because the old deed was made out to "Mary North." Then they drove around to the great office building and Le Cygne went in to get the money on the deed and to buy the tickets. It could all be

done in that one building, he said, but it would take some time.

Mary waited half an hour. Then he came back, ordered the cabman to drive to the hotel, and took his seat at Mary's side.

"There's another delay," he said. "The boat won't go till to-morrow, three o'clock."

"Oh, Jules!" said Mary, her face clouding. She could not but think of Westland and how easily they might have spent a little time there. It was but five hours' ride from Boston.

"Well," said he, irritably, "what are you looking at me for? I can't help it."

Mary shrank back with a catch of her breath. Le Cygne shrugged his shoulders.

"I ought to be in Paris to-day," he grumbled.

Mary's anxious sympathies were at once aroused.

"But the president won't blame you, Jules, when you can't get there any sooner?"

"Oh, no! But—well, you can't understand, Mary."

"Tell me," said Mary, putting her arm through his, coaxingly.

"Oh, I can't. It's all mixed up."

They went up to their room, but Le Cygne did not take off his overcoat. He moved about restlessly a minute.

"Well, I must go, Mary," said he. "I've got a lot of business to attend to."

"Why, you said you had your business all arranged."

"Well, d— Well, dear, can't a man have some new business? Here's all this day before us. I'll be back before six, and we'll have a nice cozy supper

together. You read and sleep, *cherie*. Tra-la!" And with a hasty kiss he was gone.

Mary stood staring at the closed door. Was this her Jules? The man who had been so tenderly solicitous for her only a few hours before? She sank into a chair and tried to think. Again that horror and confusion of mind! Five minutes—ten—passed, and she was no nearer a solution. Then the healthy tears came, and there was a long time of girlish crying. Finally she decided that it was only his forgetfulness—it *must* be that. He had already shown himself to be so careless about the certificate and the cab. A reaction of feeling came to her relief. She took out her Bible and gave herself up to an hour of reading and prayer, getting much comfort out of it. She remembered her mother's saying, "I will trust and not be afraid," and tried to find it in her Bible. She thought it must be in the New Testament, and turned its pages for fifteen minutes, but could not find it. She felt sure it was in the Bible, however, and repeated it over and over, staying her heart upon the words.

"I will take it for my motto," she whispered. "'I will trust and not be afraid.'"

It was still only ten by the little silver watch which had been Mrs. Sheldon's parting gift. The thought flashed upon her that she would go around to her rooms again. Maybe there was a letter from home in the morning mail. Yes—with a little calculating of time and trains—one might come, sent from Westland before they received hers—the first short one. Letters sent later would go direct to the Paris address she had given them. At any rate her piano was at the rooms and she could practice a few hours—an occupa-

tion of which she was very fond. In a few minutes she was on the street. But she felt a little sense of wrongdoing and hesitated.

"Jules might not like it," she thought. "But if he can go, why can't I?"—with a little thrill of defiance.

She lingered in uncertainty. Finally she went back, wrote a little note and pinned it to the bureau.

"There!" said she. "If he should come before I do he'll know where I am."

Running down the stairs again she left the hotel, carefully noticing the streets that she might find her way back. She had no idea which way to go, but she had become somewhat accustomed to city ways, and catching sight of a big policeman on the corner she appealed to him. He turned to her a pleasant New England face. He was born in Lowell.

"Twenty-six Vevey Street? It's a long ways from here," said he, kindly. But his directions were plain, and by changing street cars Mary finally found herself at the familiar flat again. She ran up the steps joyfully. Mrs. Clark must have received her letter and the package with the keys. How surprised she would be to see her again!

That lady answering her ring was indeed surprised, but not in the way Mary expected.

"Where's your key?" she inquired anxiously. "I hope you haven't lost it. Somebody'll be sure to find it and break into the house."

"Oh, I haven't lost it," said Mary brightly. "I mailed it to you. Didn't you get the package this morning?"

"I didn't get no package," said Mrs. Clark. She had not even noticed Mary's absence.

"I—I—"

It was not easy to tell the story after all to this narrow woman. What did she know of the French nobility? The difficulty of explaining the exalted position of her husband and the reasonableness of it all flashed across Mary's mind. They were still in the outer hall, standing before the locked door of the front parlor.

"I—the key to my study was in the package, too," said Mary. "I was away over night, you see."

"But why didn't you keep the keys in your pocket?" said Mrs. Clark. "'Tain't safe to send such things by mail."

"Oh, they were registered. I expected to be away some time. But please let me in, Mrs. Clark. I'll tell you all about it later. You have your key, haven't you?"

Mrs. Clark produced her key, opened the door rather ill-naturedly and disappeared.

The pleasant warmth and the diversion of preparing food for herself made Mary feel better. The box was undisturbed, of course, and she lingered lovingly over its contents.

"I wish Jules was here," she thought, trying to conquer her uneasiness. A vague presentiment of trouble beset her—a sharp, recurring fear. She fought against it, summoning back to her mind all the beautiful things her husband had told her of his home—remembering all of his fondness for her. Then when all failed her she tried to philosophize, falling back upon the fact that it was done now, and she must face the future bravely. This failing, also, she was driven to religion. She *must* "trust and not be afraid." She supposed all young wives felt strange at first

In the afternoon she wrote a letter home, giving more details. She knew that every word would be read with interest—how keen and painful the interest she could not guess. The letter ran in part:

"We are detained for a day. The engines of *L'Esperance* are out of order, and I am unexpectedly back at my rooms again for a few hours while Jules is finishing his business. I wrote you a long letter yesterday. Jules is going to pay the rent three months in advance—he thought best the rooms should be ready at any time we might return. We are still at the Merodack. It is a fine hotel, but I don't like hotels very well. I will write you all about Paris when we get there. I am going to write Stephen and maybe he can come and see us. Jules is dark and not so tall as Stephen. He is a very handsome man and very polite.

"I think I ought to tell you that I met Jules in Westland. It was the Saturday before I came to Boston. He was there on business, and asked his way of me, and then walked home with me, but only to the gate. Then the next day he called, but you were out with the bees and auntie was asleep. Of course I did not plan it—it just happened. I wanted to tell you then, but it seemed so foolish! I did not know at that time that he cared specially for me. Then he began to call on me here, and you know the rest. I hope you will not think I was hasty. I prayed a good deal. It was very sudden, but it must be right. Jules' health is delicate and he needed me at once."

Mary could not write more, because of the tormenting doubts that swooped down upon her. She hastily signed her name, "Mary" only, sealed the letter and

ran out to put it in the box herself. Then she came back and practiced her music diligently. She kept a close watch for the postman, however. The letter for Mrs. Clark might come, and she hoped faintly that there might be a letter from home for herself.

When four o'clock drew near she set the little tea service in order, carefully refilling the tiny lamp. Maybe Jules would go to the hotel early, and finding her note would come after her. Then they would have tea together in the old happy fashion. How pretty the cups were! She wished she could take them with her—his first gift. There were others just as nice, no doubt, in the castle, but none would ever be as dear to her. What a remarkable man her husband was! He seemed to know everything. Dear Jules! With all his business how could she expect him always to remember about her?

Mary decided not to tell Mrs. Clark after all, but to let her find it out by the letter and parcel. That is, unless Le Cygne came. In that case, it would be easy to call Mrs. Clark in and introduce him as her husband. But to explain everything—no, it would be better to let the letter do it. Strange the package was so delayed. But letters were often delayed a day, and the parcel, being registered, might be even slower in coming.

It was five o'clock. Mary regretfully concluded that Le Cygne was not coming, and hastily putting things in order again, she rushed away. The fear had suddenly beset her that she might not get home—for the dingy hotel meant home to her—in time to welcome Le Cygne when he came from his business. Such an unwifely thing!

CHAPTER X

A GLIMPSE OF THE UNDERWORLD

Mary found her way to the hotel without difficulty. The whistles were blowing for six o'clock as she entered the room, but Le Cygne was not there. Her note lay untouched. He had not been there.

Mary's first feeling was that of relief, but as time passed and he did not come, she became first anxious, then alarmed. She asked herself a hundred times what could have happened. An accident? Sickness? For he was not well. Could business have detained him? But he said six o'clock. And he surely must know she would be anxious. No, it could not be business. As the hours passed Mary became certain he was sick or even dead, and her excitement was intense. What should she do? What *could* she do? She had read about policemen finding lost and sick friends. Should she appeal to them? A hundred times she thought he was coming—heard his step in the hall. She walked the floor. She threw herself on the bed. She pressed her hands over her hot temples. She sprang up again. It was her first experience of the acute anxiety that gnaws into the living heart. A score of times she knelt to pray, then sprang frantically to her feet. "I will trust and not be afraid," she moaned over and over, but even as her lips formed the words she *was* afraid.

"If he does not come at half past nine," she finally

resolved, "I must—I will do something. I must find his dead body. I will go to the police—or I will telegraph Uncle Doctor to come and help me. Uncle will come, I know. He will be well enough for that." And she remembered, as one remembers sweet music heard in a dream, how he used once in a great while to call her his "little girl."

Oh, the beautiful, dreadful city! Bright and joyous and strong and good it is to some—a lovely, sunlit, flower-bedecked landscape of opportunity. But there is not a night in all the year when it is not to others a wolfish wilderness, where wild beasts crouch and serpents hiss and honey-edged precipices lure to an awful plunge!

Mary finally put on her hat and coat, desperately determined to do something. As she neared the door her eye rested on the bell-knob. She had never used one, but she had seen Le Cygne push it and so call a waiter, and now she pressed it, hardly knowing what she did.

A bell-boy knocked in answer, and Mary opened the door.

"I am alarmed about my husband's absence," said she, striving to speak calmly.

The "boy," an intelligent looking young white man of about twenty, ceased to be the mere machine he had seemed and turned consoler.

"Oh, no, Miss," he replied. "It ain't late yet. He'll come 'round all right. Our gentlemen often stay out till eleven or twelve."

"But he said he was coming at six."

"Oh, well, Miss, gentlemen is often delayed."

"But," insisted Mary, "I am sure he must be sick."

Then, as the man offered nothing further, "Can't you help me find him?"

"I don't know what we can do, Miss. What was his business?"

"He is—" But she must not tell his secrets. "He is a French gentleman. We are to sail to-morrow for Paris on the French steamship *L'Esperance.*"

"There ain't no French steamship sails from Boston, Miss, to-morrow nor any other day."

Mary looked at him in bewilderment.

Just at that moment two men, coming down the hall, turned towards the door. Mary glanced at them and uttered a glad cry, "Oh, Jules!" Then her heart seemed to cramp within her. He *was* sick. He had fallen in the street and his clothes were covered with mud. His face was red. His hat was on the back of his head, and he was leaning heavily on the arm of the man with him, a hotel waiter as Mary knew by his white apron, who was trying to lead him into the room.

"Hello, Mary!" said Le Cygne, with a jovial lurch towards her. "Goin' off with one o' the b'hoys, eh? Got home just in time to stop a runaway match, didn't I?"

Mary, uncomprehending, had instinctively taken hold of his other arm, assisting the waiter, and together they got him to the bed and on it. He closed his eyes and seemed unconscious.

"He is dying!" cried Mary, in agony.

"Oh, no, Miss," said the bell-boy with a smile. "Don't be scared, Miss. We often have 'em that way, Miss. He ain't sick—that is, he'll be all right in the morning."

"Do you think so?" said Mary. "Oh! what shall I do? Can't you get a doctor?"

"He don't need no doctor, Miss. He'll be all right in an hour or two."

The man spoke with such positiveness that Mary recovered a little from her frantic alarm.

"What is the matter with him?" said she.

"He's just dr— Why, Miss, can't you smell him? He's taken a little too much."

Mary stared at the man. He was smiling at her reassuringly, as if it was the most commonplace matter in the world. Finally she understood him. Then, suddenly, the dignity of wifely loyalty came upon her, overmastering even her alarm. She, the wife of Jules Henri le Cygne, to have listened to such an insinuation against her magnificent, beautiful husband who lay dying perhaps before her!

She drew herself up proudly and turned to the smiling men.

"You may leave the room," she said haughtily.

The men bowed obsequiously and withdrew. But they exchanged glances and still smiled.

Mary turned to the bed. Then she had to lean against it, for the prostrate form moved weirdly before her, up and down, from side to side. Yet she knew it lay quiet—that there was no real motion.

She rallied with a great effort. What could she do? Tearing off her gloves she bathed the face and limp hands of the nearly unconscious man. The cold water seemed to revive him a little. He opened his eyes and an unmeaning smile came over his face. An idiotic child had lived in the family of one of the doctor's neighbors, and there was something in the smile

that made Mary think of that child. She shuddered. He made a great effort to speak, seeming to search for his words one by one.

"Mushn't be—scared," he said, thickly. "Little too much—of the—" he laughed aloud in a drunken gurgle— "medishin! Thash all!" Then he relapsed into insensibility.

Mary felt mentally as she had once felt physically when, searching after eggs in the doctor's big barn, she had unwittingly run into a great mass of cobwebs. The tiny strands enwrapped and confused her. She could not brush them away. They were across her face—in her hair. So now. What did it all mean? Medicine? Had he been drugged?

Suddenly she remembered how he had insisted that the whisky he had given her, and the wine of the restaurant supper was "medicine." Could it be—was he, as the bell-boy had intimated—could it be that he was *drunk?* Then the man's words, "Don't you smell him?" came back to her. She leaned forward to catch his breath, but she need not have changed her position. The whole body was reeking with the odor of liquor and tobacco.

It seemed to Mary as if everything she had ever known or heard flashed through her mind the next moment, as drowning persons are said to review a lifetime in a second. There were stories of drunkards and of the heroic efforts of their friends to save them—of men shooting their wives—hatcheting out the brains of their children in drunken frenzies—a little snatch of a temperance poem she had once heard a boy recite:

> Go, see what I have seen;
> Go, feel what I have felt.

But dominating all, a still center in the whirling ferment of her mind, came a fierce resolve to *know*, and this soon brought strength and composure.

In terrified quietness she sought the pulse in the wrist lying exposed on the bed, as she had often seen the doctor do at home. Her light touch did not arouse the sleeper. The beat was full and strong, and she felt sure that he would not die at once. Then, still wearing her hat and coat, she slipped out, down the stairs and, passing a group of loafers in the doorway, gained the street. A doctor she must find, and she would not again ask help of the people in the hotel. She thought of the kind policeman.

The street was well lighted and many men and women were leisurely walking up and down. Their aspect seemed vaguely strange—she did not stop to think why. But there was the policeman on the familiar corner. No, it was not the same man, but another. Well, she would speak to him—any policeman would help her, of course.

She started to go to him, but her brain was not quite clear, and the sidewalk seemed to tip a little as she walked. She kept her feet with difficulty.

"How de do? You're a daisy!'

A man's voice almost hissed the words in Mary's ear, so near was the speaker.

She turned and saw a lecherous face leering into hers. She had never seen the man before. If she had not been past fright she would have been paralyzed with fear. As it was, he seemed only another figure in the nightmare of horrors around her. She tried to push him away—to walk on past him—but he took hold of her arm.

"Oh, come on!" he said. "Devilish becomin', yer high and mighty ways. But ye can't walk straight. Pretty well boozed up, already, eh? Come in now and have another drink—I've got the spondulix. An' then I'll see you home, eh?" And he laughed.

Mary struggled hard to pull away. She had no doubt about *this* man's being drunk—she could smell him plainly enough. But he clung to her obstinately. A little street gamin noticed the scuffle and called out shrilly, "Hi! See de leddy an' de dude a-scrappin'!" A crowd began to gather.

Mary desperately lifted her right arm, free yet, and struck the man full in the face. There was no forethought about the blow. Her hand flew out in exactly the same way that the hand of a drowning man flies up—a purely instinctive act. It was not a light blow and her tormentor staggered back a step or two, releasing his hold. Mary slipped away, she never knew how, and flew back to the hotel, up the stairs and into the room. She turned the key and listened breathlessly for a moment. She was not followed. Then between the terror outside and the terror inside she cowered down on the floor and lay there for hours more dead than alive.

Le Cygne was still asleep; she could hear him breathing heavily, sometimes snoring. She remembered reading that drunken men snored, and the terrible belief slowly forced itself upon her that the man she had married had deceived her—that he did use liquor. Many things were plain now—the readiness with which the liquor had been ordered as "medicine," and even Le Cygne's perfumed breath. He used so often to come to the study smelling of winter-green or

violets. To Mary's stifled cries and prayers succeeded gradually a time of intense thought—a calm, a singular exaltation. This was her cup to drink, a bitter, bitter cup. Why, oh, why? But she must not ask why. It was enough that God had permitted it and God was good. Mother said that, and it was true. Whatever the life before her, she would face it bravely. She would—she *must* trust in God—"trust and not be afraid." It could not be that the habit was fixed yet—he so young, so good, so noble! She would care for him, watch over him. How dreadful his mortification and remorse would be when he wakened! What could have led him, still so young, into the degrading habit? Ah, his mother was dead! And in his high social life there had been temptations such as she could not conceive of! Poor, poor Jules! Perhaps it was for his reformation, his soul's salvation, that she had been led to the hasty marriage. Her present terror and distress grew small to her as this great idea dawned on her mind; and her whole soul seemed to melt within her in an agony of pity and longing for her husband. She would devote her whole life to him. She would pray. She would *compel* his salvation. Mary had never come so near to truly loving this man before, but it was the love of a mother—a savior.

The morning light was creeping in at the windows, and the morning street roar was beginning outside. The room was chilly. Mary rose, balancing herself at first by the wall. Then, strong in her beautiful enthusiasm, she crept softly to the bed, and, taking off her jacket, spread it gently over Le Cygne. The slight movement partly wakened him. He opened his eyes, put out his hand and got hold of hers.

"You are sick, Jules, and I was afraid you might be cold," said Mary, tenderly. "Do you feel better?"

"Yesh—feel better! Yesh—sick!"

He seemed to be trying to think. Then the idiotic smile drew up the corners of his lips, and he slowly added:

"Guesh I—was drunk. Don't mind, do you, Mary? Come to bed. Come down here. Kish me, Mary."

He tried to pull her down to him, but she stood as if turned to stone. A minute more and his arms relaxed and he was asleep again.

An awful revulsion of physical terror swept over the girl. Her lately found strength vanished utterly, and she was swaying again, dizzily. She dropped noiselessly to her hands and knees, and crept in stealth and sickening fear to the other side of the room. Not for worlds would she waken him again. There was a lounge and she tried weakly to climb on it, but could not. Then came merciful unconsciousness.

When she came to herself the room was light and warm. Le Cygne still slept, not snoring now. Mary, still lying on the floor, outlined her plan. She must get a doctor. Whatever it was—this illness—that was the first thing to do. Even if it was what she knew it was, there must be medicine and help, for they must be at the boat by three. She must try again—she *must.* No one would speak to her in the daytime—no one did the morning before. It was because it was in the night that the man had spoken to her, and because she must have been staggering. And the good policeman was so near! Once on the ocean and away from temptation, Jules would get over this attack, and she

could reason with him, watch him, pray with him, love him out of the habit.

She dared not try to get her jacket, but she arranged her hat and got out of the door without arousing the sleeper. Her heart was beating till it seemed to choke her, and she was nauseated and giddy, but the cool air revived her. The street had its usual daytime appearance, dingy and disagreeable, but not like that of the night before. She could almost have believed the incident of the evening was a dream, only that all seemed like a hideous nightmare.

She reached the policeman without trouble. It was her old friend of the day before. He turned towards her as she timidly touched his sleeve.

"Can you tell me where I can get a doctor?" said she. "My husband is sick in the hotel and I must find a doctor."

The man looked her over shrewdly, noting her lack of wrap in the crisp winter weather and her haggard, anxious face.

"A doctor? Yes, ma'am. I kin tell ye where to find one, or what's better yit, I kin send one to ye. What hotel are ye stoppin' at?"

"The Merodack, right here."

"Wall, you jes go back—I'll walk over with ye—and rest easy. I'll have a doctor 'round in a jiffy. What's the number of your room?"

"Thirty-nine."

The man took hold of her arm in a fatherly way, for he saw she could hardly stand, and started with her towards the hotel.

"Ye musn't take it to heart so," said he kindly. "Hev ye got any money? Here! Come in here an'

git a cup of coffee." And he led Mary, too overcome by the sense of protection to resist, into a cheap little restaurant, and gave her a stool before a high lunch counter.

"Bring the lady a cup of coffee and a ham sandwich," said he.

Mary ate and drank. She needed food. A dash of color came to her face and she felt stronger.

"There now," said the man, well pleased. "I'll take ye 'roun' to the hotel now, and then I'll send ye a doctor. What might yer name be?"

"Mary North. Or—my husband's name is Jules le Cygne. We have not been married long."

He looked at her keenly, but her face was truthful.

"Wall, I'd advise ye to move to some other hotel. The Merodack ain't a very good one."

"We're going away to-day," said Mary.

"Ye see," continued the man, "the Merodack is ruther a disruptable house. The men take their fancy girls there, ye know. But bein' as ye're goin' so soon, it won't make no gret differ'nce. Here ye are, now. I'll send the doctor." He left her at the door.

Mary had been gone hardly fifteen minutes, but when she softly opened the door of the room Le Cygne was up and sitting in one of the easy chairs. On the table at his side stood a tray with the familiar bottle and glasses, the bottle well emptied. His eyes were half closed. He had wakened, ordered the liquor and was fast relapsing into a drunken stupor. He was too bright a man to give way often to actual intoxication, but when he did his attacks lasted several days.

He opened his eyes and looked at Mary, the corners of his lips drawing up in the smile in which the rest of

the face took no part. He spoke, still with some difficulty.

"Oh! You come back? Thought you'd gone. Have a drink?"

The horror in Mary's staring eyes seemed to sober him somewhat. He rose and tried to go to her, but his poise failed him, and he sank heavily back into the chair. Mary did not speak nor move.

Presently she heard him muttering to himself, with occasional dull glances at her. She caught some words:

"Got sand—ain't the squealin' kind—quiet kind—daisy—got sand!"

There was much besides that she could not understand. Then the eyelids closed and he was still.

The doctor came, a young man in his first year of practice. An air of professional gravity struggled with his boyish eagerness. Le Cygne gave no sign of consciousness. The doctor felt his pulse, shook him in an effort to arouse him, pulled up an eyelid, eliciting an angry "Le'me 'lone!" and turned to Mary with an air of wisdom absolute.

"It is a case of alcoholism, madam, acute alcoholism, carried almost to the point of coma. In other words, your—husband?"

Mary nodded.

"Your husband is unfortunately suffering from intoxication, but there is not the slightest danger in the case. The heart's action is perfectly normal, and in a few hours he will doubtless be quite well again. I should advise against any further indulgence, however." He glanced towards the bottle.

Mary carried the tray to the door and set it on the floor in the hall outside.

"This is not the first time he has unfortunately been overcome?" queried the doctor. "He is addicted to the habit?"

"I do not know. We have not been married long."

"Ah! Well, I assure you, madam, there is not the least occasion for concern. In a day or two he will be quite himself."

"We must sail on the boat *L'Esperance* at three o'clock to-day," said Mary. "Our tickets are bought, and—and matters of great importance in Mr. Le Cygne's business make it very necessary for us to go. Can't you give him something that will—will make him able to go?"

"I will do my best, madam."

"Please help me all you can, doctor. I am quite alone, and I—"

She could not go on. She was thinking of another doctor—the only one she had ever known before—her good old guardian with his manifold kindnesses running out so freely to everybody in need. And even this city stranger seemed touched by her friendlessness.

"I will do my utmost, madam," he repeated. "And we will begin at once. Will you order a glass of water and a spoon?"

"I—I—" stammered Mary, irresolutely. She dreaded to ring the bell again. The doctor smiled, mistaking her hesitation for ignorance, and rang the bell himself, giving his order to the boy in the tone of a master. Preparing the medicine, he roused Le Cygne with difficulty, and succeeded in compelling him to swallow a teaspoonful of it.

"There," said he. "We'll see how that will affect him. But I'm afraid he won't be up by three o'clock."

"Oh, what shall I do?" said Mary, piteously. "Can't you help me get him on the boat, doctor? I will pay you well. My husband is—has an important government position and we *must* make the boat."

"Why, just order a cab, and get him into it—he'll be well enough for that. And—yes, I'll be glad to help you. What did you say was the name of the boat?"

"*L'Esperance.* It is a French liner for Paris—or rather for Havre."

"A French liner? I don't know of any French line of steamships leaving from Boston. Or is it from New York?"

"Oh, from Boston, I'm sure. I've been to the office."

"Where is the office?"

"I don't know. I am not much acquainted with the city—this part of the city. We drove there in a carriage."

The doctor looked at her doubtfully. Was she an adventuress? But her distress was evidently real, and she said she could pay. She was pretty, too, only pale.

"Let me see your tickets," said he, with a happy thought. "They will tell us all about it."

"Oh, yes," said Mary, relieved. But a moment later her embarrassment returned. Le Cygne still lay in a stupor.

"My husband has the tickets," she said: "Jules! Jules!"

Overcoming her repugnance, she put her hand on his shoulder and tried to arouse him. But there was no response.

The doctor laid hold of him and shook him vigorously.

"Here, wake up!" he said. "Your wife wants to ask you a question."

"Where are the tickets, Jules?" asked Mary.

But a foolish response of "Ain't got no tickets," was all that could be got out of the man.

"Look in his pockets," said the doctor, impatiently. "They must be there."

Mary began confusedly to feel in Le Cygne's pockets. She drew out some papers, the morocco card-case she remembered so well, some bits of cardboard, a pistol, a piece of plug tobacco and a small roll of money. She hastily thrust the things back, one by one, as a glance told her they were not what she was looking for.

"I cannot find them," said she in distress.

"Oh, well," said the doctor, looking at his watch, "you say your boat leaves at three. He'll come to his senses enough to answer questions in an hour or two. Get a teaspoonful of this medicine down him every half hour if you can, and I'll call again about noon. It's only nine now. There'll be plenty of time then to get to the boat."

Mary helplessly acquiesced and the doctor left with renewed assurance of return at noon.

With her mind full of this latest anxiety, the missing tickets, Mary nerved herself to make a thorough search for them. "I must! I must!" she thought to herself. "We must get to the boat! Jules will be

disgraced with the president if we don't get off. I *must* save him!"

Le Cygne lay in the chair, inertly asleep. His head had dropped on his chest. Relieved from the embarrassing presence of the doctor, Mary again took out the contents of his pockets one by one, examining them carefully. She found many things strange to her, things that she looked at with alarm and suspicion. There was a small photograph of an unclad woman. How in the world could such an indecent thing as that be in her husband's pocket! But most inexplicable of all, among the envelopes and papers she found her own first letter to the doctor, written the night of her marriage. She remembered asking Jules if he had mailed that letter and he had said yes. However, he might have forgotten. But how was it that the letter and the envelope with it were torn in two, squarely down the middle? She stared at the pieces, frowning, bewildered. Oh! Perhaps he had not discovered his lapse of memory till after the second—the longer—letter had been written. That was—oh, when was it? When had she written it? Time had ceased its markings in her mind—the days and nights had run together. But she must think it out. They had been married on Wednesday—she remembered that well for it was on Wednesday that her Thanksgiving box had come. It was the day for her music lesson, too, and Professor Hertzog had been wonderfully kind. Everything had been so pleasant that first day of her engagement. And she had been going to tell it all to Jules, only his news and then the other things had driven it out of her mind. But—but the letters! Yes, married Wednesday—this short first

letter in her hand was written that evening—and Thursday morning, Thanksgiving Day, she had written the second letter home. No, she had intended to write it in the morning, but the boat had been delayed, so it was evening before she wrote, with Jules sitting beside her reading his paper. It was then that she had written all of the letters—to Uncle Doctor and Professor Hertzog and Mrs. Clark. Then Friday, yesterday, was the lonely day at her rooms. She was glad that she herself had mailed the letter written there—the third. Yes, probably by the time Jules had found out that he had forgotten to mail the first letter the second one had gone; and he had thought it would be useless to send the first one at all and so had torn it in two. She wished he had told her about it, but it mattered little. Nothing mattered much—only the tickets, and these she could not find.

Suddenly she bethought herself of Le Cygne's overcoat lying across the foot of the disordered bed. The tickets were there, of course—they must be. She carried the coat to the table and with the resolve in mind not to overlook anything in this last search she took out the contents of all the pockets and laid them on the table. But there were no steamship tickets—of that she soon became convinced. There were more letters, however, five or six, and among them, all those that she had written Thursday! And all torn down the middle! There were her keys also, but no money.

The cobwebby feeling came again over Mary's brain. What did it mean? Had she gone crazy? She looked at her hand and opened and closed the fingers, noting the physical sensations. No, she was not insane, nor dreaming. Her mind seemed suddenly to clear up.

She was herself—Mary North. The man she had married had deceived her as to his habits. But *she was married!* Moreover, she loved him—she tried hard to insist on this to herself, to find her strongest motive in it—and she was determined to save him. She could expect no help from him in the task, but she would save him in spite of himself. And as a first step she must solve the mysteries surrounding her. No more sentiment—no more girlishness—no more tears. She was no longer a girl, but a wife. And a prayer went up from a tense heart that God would help her to accept calmly and fulfill patiently the part of a faithful wife.

She opened and put together enough of the torn halves of her own letters to be sure of them. Then she took up the unmutilated letters—three of them still in envelopes opened at the end. They were addressed in a woman's uncultured handwriting to

Mr. William Sloan
362 cadbury Street
Boston Mass

and bore different dates. Wondering, dully, how letters directed to another man came to be in her husband's possession, Mary nevertheless set herself to read them. They were signed "Emma" and "Your loving wife, Emma." They were not very long. The urgent message of all three was for money to meet a certain pressing demand, and the writer of the letter seemed to apprehend some great calamity in case the money was not sent, and wrote wildly and with many misspelled words and appeals to God about being "without a home for the children." Despairing

of gaining any light from these letters, Mary replaced them, resolving at the earliest possible moment to ask Le Cygne who Mr. Sloan was, and how the letters came to be in his possession. All this occupied but a few minutes and scarcely diverted Mary from her anxious search for the tickets.

Le Cygne had brought to the room a light traveling bag. It was to be, he had said, his only baggage on the ocean voyage. "I never could bear to travel with a lot of trunks and satchels," he had protested. "It's so much more convenient to buy what you need." Mary had little hope of finding the tickets in this bag, but she faithfully went to the bottom, carefully shaking out every garment. There were no tickets.

Completely foiled, she gave up the search. She must wait till Le Cygne could answer her questions. She knew drunken people often lost things, or had them stolen out of their pockets, and it seemed certain that the tickets were gone. And yet Le Cygne had money, still. That had not been lost or stolen as she would have supposed.

But it was time for the medicine. Nerving herself for the task, Mary aroused Le Cygne as much as possible and put the spoon to his lips. Though some of the liquid ran down the sides of his mouth, she felt sure he swallowed the larger part. Then she sat down to wait.

But it was impossible for her to sit still. A hundred plans flashed into her mind—to seek again the policeman who had showed her kindness and to confide in him—to go to Mrs. Clark. Unsympathetic as that woman had seemed she surely would help her in such a strait as this. Oh! There was the French consul,

an intimate friend of Le Cygne's. But she could not appeal to him without betraying her husband's condition, which might then be reported to the president. If simply borrowing money was considered in Paris an unbusinesslike and disgraceful thing, how much more this! No, she would not go to the consul.

But the minutes were slipping past. At noon the doctor would come. How could Mary face him without the tickets! Oh, what should she do? Jules had spoken of a stateroom reserved. The steamship company must, of course, have a record of the money paid. Perhaps if she could see them and explain, they would issue duplicate tickets. She would try. She must do something. No one would come to the room, and there was no danger of Jules' awaking. Yes, she would go to the steamship company's office. But she must not seem excited or do anything to attract attention. With trembling hands she arranged her hair and adjusted her hat and jacket. She even put on her gloves. As she reached the door she paused a moment, then turned back and took again the little roll of money from the pocket of the unconscious man. It had occurred to her to buy new tickets even rather than to miss the boat. Jules' honor must be kept from stain at all cost. And when he came to himself and learned how she had saved him her influence over him would be all the greater.

Mary found her way again without trouble to the policeman on the corner. He greeted her with a friendly query for her husband's health, but he could give her no information whatever about the boat.

"But we are to sail on it this very afternoon," insisted Mary.

"Well, I should think you would know yourself where the office was then?"

"But my husband made all the arrangements and he—he can't attend to business yet."

"But can't he tell you where the office is—or why don't you go to a directory? That's the way, ma'am. Directories have everything in them. Here, go right to that drugstore on the corner and ask the clerk to show you the place in the directory where the steamship companies are listed. That's the best way, ma'am; that's the way out for you."

Mary thanked him and followed his advice. The clerk at the drugstore was very kind, showing her how to find the place in the bulky book; but search as she would, and even with his help, she could find no trace of any French steamer sailing from Boston.

"Very well," said Mary. "Can you direct me to the office of the French consul?" It was her last resort.

The clerk was able to give her the needed direction, after himself consulting the directory, and Mary had no difficulty in finding the place, which was only a few squares away. An assistant, the only occupant of the office at the still early hour, mechanically reaffirmed the statement that there was no direct way of going from Boston to Havre by any line of steamships. As Mary stood at the desk leaning against it for support, the truth at last dawned upon her that Le Cygne had deceived her in this matter also—that there had been no tickets—that the ocean voyage, and very likely the "castle of his forefathers," was a myth. And—even the government service? She must know.

Steadying her voice with a great effort, she asked

the question: "Are you acquainted with Mr. Jules le Cygne, a gentleman employed here by the French government?—in the naval department?"

The clerk knew no such man, and, moreover, was very sure that no such person was employed by the French government in Boston.

The next moment he sprang from his chair, for the girl, at whom up to this time he had scarcely looked, had dropped death-like to the floor.

When Mary opened her eyes it was to find her face wet and two or three men bending anxiously over her. One of them was holding a glass to her mouth. In this new world she was learning about, it seemed to her there was liquor, liquor everywhere.

"Take a little more of the brandy, Miss," said the clerk, kindly. But Mary pushed it away. They helped her into a chair.

"If I may sit here a few minutes," she said with trembling lips.

"Oh, certainly, Miss. And can I do anything more for you?"

Mary shook her head, and, whispering among themselves, evidently to the effect that she was better off alone, the men dispersed.

No matter how seemingly unendurable a thing life may become, the habit of living usually holds its own. In spite of the mysterious horror of her situation, the tides of life soon flowed back through Mary's veins, and she rose to her feet. With a word of thanks to the man at the desk she passed from the office and walked steadily to the hotel. People meeting her paused and turned at her ghastly face, but she saw no one. She no longer feared Le Cygne; she felt no

repulsion from him. She did not *feel* at all. The whole world of her emotions—fear, hate, love, even disgust—seemed dead. Her very being was intent on one thing—to know.

Le Cygne wakened at her entrance. The medicine was doing its work. He seemed surprised to see her, but smiled gaily. He started to rise, but for obvious reasons gave up the attempt.

"Hello! If it ain't Mary!" said he. His face beamed a welcome and there was a world of jovial good fellowship in his voice. "Glad to see you! Glad you come! Thought you'd gone back on me. Come and have a drink." He turned to the table. "Why, where's the whisky? Ring the bell, Mary, and tell 'em to send up two cocktails. Don't like cocktails? Nonsense. You must learn to like 'em."

Mary walked to the table where the bottle of medicine was still standing and silently prepared a dose. She carried it to him.

"The doctor says you are to take this," she said. Something in her voice checked either inquiry or objection.

Le Cygne swallowed the medicine, but as he handed back the glass he caught hold of her dress in maudlin playfulness. She mechanically drew the folds away from his grasp.

She sat down on the side of the bed just out of his reach, and looked at him steadily. Her dilated eyes glowed, intensely black now against the frightful pallor of her face. She still believed him to be her husband.

"Where you been?" said he at last. "I didn't need no doctor."

"To the French consulate."

"Oh!" A shade of bewilderment crossed his face. "You been to the French consulate? What for?"

"I went to inquire about the tickets."

"What tickets?"

"The steamship tickets on which you said we were to sail to-day."

"Oh, the tickets!" said Le Cygne. He drew his brows together, evidently trying to remember something. "Oh, the tickets!" He burst into a maudlin laugh. "The tickets! Oh, yes! The tickets! Ha! ha! ha! ha! Best joke yet! She went to inquire for the tickets!"

Presently Mary's face attracted his attention.

"Well, what did you find out about the tickets?" he asked, still laughing.

Receiving no reply he leaned forward and tried to get hold of her.

"Why, don't you understand, Mary? It was all a joke. There wan't no tickets. It was all a joke about the steamer and all that."

"Was it a joke about our being married?" said Mary. But though she asked the question she still had no suspicion of what the answer would be.

The only reason Le Cygne did not throw his arms about Mary in an outburst of delight at this new suggestion, was that he could not reach her, and he instinctively judged it to be unsafe to try his feet just yet. But he laughed hilariously. He had reached a stage which physicians and nurses will recognize. He was supremely happy, entirely satisfied with himself and the world in general. He could not understand why Mary should be troubled.

"Well, Mary, if you ain't a smart one! There ain't one girl in a thousand that would have seen through it. Yes, the wedding was all a joke, too, don't you see?" He went off into another fit of laughter, with the evident expectation that she, too, would enjoy the situation.

Mary sat in a paralysis of horror. But he went on in drunken frankness, holding the words in his mouth a little in evident enjoyment of the information he was giving.

"Yes, the wedding was a joke, too! All a j—joke! All just in fun, Mary, don't you see? I've known you, my dear, ever since you were a kid. You snowballed me once—snowballed me, oh,. ever so long ago, in Westland. I was visiting Fred Griggs—he was a kid then and you was a kid, too. And one day we met you on the street and he called you a cat, and then you turned 'round and fought like a vixen. Don't you remember? I'd forgotten all about it, blanked if I hadn't till I met you that day last fall. But that hadn't a thing to do with this. Billy Sloan ain't the kind to harbor grudges against nobody. But when I tumbled right on to you—deuced handsome you were, too—it just came over me that I'd have a little fun with you. And ain't we had fun? Your 'Rev. Samuel Hopkins'—ha! ha! ha!—why, that was Griggs himself! No more minister'n I am! He'n I've been pardners for years.—All just to have a little fun! He had on a false moustache, or you'd a-known him, 'course, with his nose. Rev. Samuel Hopkins! Ha! ha! ha! Griggs didn't want to do it for fear you'd kick when you found it out, but It old him you wan't the kickin' kind.—And the South End Methodist Church! I just—ha! ha!—I

invented that, too, just as I did the boat. I invented them both to please you, duckie—ain't anything I wouldn't do to satisfy you. You pretty near got me about the marriage certificate, but I got 'round it. I knew you'd be all right if I could only put you off a day or two. And you *are* all right, ain't you? It's just my little joke with you, my dear. That's the straight goods this time. Made me pay him seventy-five dollars for the job, Griggs did—twice as much as it was worth," and his face darkened, "but I'll get even with him yet."

Mary did not stir nor speak, and the drunken words flowed on.

"Oh, come, Mary, what you look at me that way for? Haven't we had a good time so far? I've treated you white, Mary, and I will treat you white right along. Nobody can't say that Bill Sloan don't do the fair thing by his girls. You ain't the first girl I've broken in—not by a long shot! Kick some at first—that's natural—but they soon get used to it. Why, Mary, you can go out any night—a girl with your face and figure—figure's a great point in your business and you carry your head like a princess—you can go out any night and earn fifty dollars! That for steady. And you might stumble on to a fortune some day just as like as not. Can go to the 'way up hotels, and keep your own maid. Think of that! You'll see the day when you'll thank Billy Sloan for setting you up in business, eh? Oh, I forgot to tell you—the name was a joke, too—Jules Henri le Cygne! Ha! ha! ha! It's a little convenience I invented for myself. But my grandmother was a French woman—used to live in Canada—'Canuck' they call 'em up in New Hamp-

shire—and I look the dandy Frenchman. You ain't the first girl that's gone mashed on me. I can't help girls falling in love with me, can I? But don't you worry, Mary. I've got money. I couldn't raise but the five hundred on your land, not even after they telegraphed to find out how much 'twas worth. It was a shame. I expected to get a thousand."

Mary sat white, deathlike. Her awful stillness at last struck the man. He leaned forward threateningly.

"You needn't make any fuss about it, my fine lady. You belong to me now, and that's the long and short of it. You ain't the first girl I've broken in—you needn't think you can get away. You've lost your money, and your reputation ain't exactly as white as it used to be. Your old corpse of an uncle will be glad enough to get rid of you now you've put your foot in it. You're mine, my girl. If you try to run away—you can't get away. I'll comb Boston with a fine-tooth comb to find you. Couldn't lose so sweet a girl as you are, my dear—just the first week. You've done it, ducksie. You're in for it, and there's no use kickin' about it. You can't back out if you try."

Still no response.

Suddenly Le Cygne stretched out his arms towards Mary. "Oh, come, darlin'," said he, "come to my arms. Make the best of it. We'll have a good time of it—lots of fun! A short life and a merry one—that's my motto. Come to my arms, Mary." And he started to sing, in a wavering, maudlin tone,

> We'll let the wide world wag as it will,
> We'll be gay and happy still,
> We'll let the—

It seemed to Mary that the end of the world had come. The feeling of bewilderment was gone. She understood everything—the skill with which Le Cygne had palmed himself off upon her as a French gentleman—his craftiness in getting hold of the deed. As a complete picture, perfect in every detail, may be flashed instantly and forever upon a sensitized photographic plate, so the whole hideous plot flashed out with absolute clearness of detail upon Mary's mind. Her breath came and went in little gasps. It came to her in a dim, incidental way, as if it was a matter that concerned, not herself at all, but some far-off stranger,—that she was dying. She did not feel either glad or sorry about it.

Le Cygne leaned back in his chair, watching her dully, the smile of self-complacence still lingering on his lips. A moment longer and the light failed for the stricken girl. She sank slowly, half fainting, on the bed.

The man got on his feet with difficulty and unsteadily approached her. His greedy eyes gloated on the prostrate form. His lips were parted in a sensual smile.

In the Inquisition they used to bring their fainting victims back to life by touching them with red hot irons. Le Cygne put his hand on Mary and tried to caress her. But his touch was to her a shock as of an electric battery. She sprang to her feet, alive, strong. She cast him violently from her with a terrible cry—a long scream which rang through half the great hotel. Fifty people heard it and turned pale with horror. It was such a cry as pierces the air when an engine's iron wheels pass over a quivering body, or as when

a man feels himself falling down an elevator shaft—down—down!

The clerk in the office went white. "It's murder!" he gasped, rushing to the stairway. But before he reached it the girl darted past. Out! Away!

CHAPTER XI

FLIGHT

Mary fled from the hotel in frantic fear. There was but one thought in her mind—escape! To get away from the touch of the vile hand—the sight of the hideous face. Fortunately she had not taken off her hat or jacket. At the hotel entrance was the usual row of waiting cabs. A cabman stood holding open the door of the one nearest, and Mary sprang into it.

"Take me away!" she said. "Anywhere—quick!"

The man was not a novice. He had driven passengers to and from the Merodack for years, and quick as a flash he slammed the door, sprang to his seat and whirled away. He liked such business, it paid well. A better neighborhood was soon reached, whereupon he checked his horse and twisting about on his seat pushed aside the little window to speak to the girl within.

"Where did you say you wanted to go, Miss?" said he.

The movement of the carriage, the fresh air, and above all the necessity for action, was bringing Mary back to her senses. She thought fast. She must leave the city instantly—he said he would comb Boston to find her. She must not run the deadly danger of going to her rooms even for an instant. He would seek her there first, of course. She could not go to Westland—a horror seized her at the thought. She would go west as fast as possible, away from everything.

The man called again "Where do you want to go, Miss?"

"To the depot."

"What depot, Miss?" He peered down at her with not unkindly curiosity.

"I am going to Chicago."

A remembrance had flashed upon Mary of the map in her old geography in the grammar school and of the little black dot by Lake Michigan, concerning which she had read with girlish interest, "Chicago is the metropolis of the west."

"All right, Miss. Boston and Albany, South Station, you want. Get you there just in time for the express. Leaves at two o'clock."

He closed the window and the carriage rattled on.

Suddenly Mary thought of money, and a cold chill of horror crept over her. She had, as she remembered, less than five dollars. Oh, that was not enough. She could not get away. Her hand involuntarily sought her purse. Why, here was a fifty dollar bill! And two fives! Mary gazed at them in bewilderment. Was it a miracle? Suddenly it came back to her how she had taken the money from Le Cygne when she started out to see about the tickets. It was her money, too—all that was left of the sale of her mother's home, probably. She supposed he had sold it. But never mind, since she had enough to get away with. A thrill of exultant thankfulness came over her as her hand closed on the roll. Surely God had not wholly forsaken her—He had provided a way of escape. "With every temptation a way of escape." That was in the Bible. Yes, she would go to Chicago.

Presently she found herself at the familiar South

Station. Several trains stood steaming up under the great low-arched roof. She bought her ticket, found the Chicago train, and, crouching down in the corner of a seat, waited in terror the time of starting. She quite forgot in her panic that she had left Le Cygne nearly helpless, and expected him every moment to come searching for her. At last the train moved. Slipping along past the prim suburbs with their pretty houses and smoothly trimmed evergreen trees, it rolled out at last into the open country.

Mary lifted her head little by little, and with face still ghastly, studied furtively the forms and faces of her traveling companions. She soon satisfied herself that she was not followed, and, released from the pressure of her terrible fear, thought awoke.

Then unmindful of all around her she lived over and over again the dreadful days. It was the involuntary action of the mind by which one goes over a thousand times the harrowing details of the death hour of a dear one, or the sudden horror of the crash of a railway wreck. Again and again she said to herself, "It is a dream—it must be a dream." She stretched her hands and pinched her arm as she had read of people doing, till she satisfied herself that she was awake—it was real. At one of the stops of the train a young babe's cry rang out—a mother was traveling with her child. The wail smote Mary's heart like the blow of an iron flail on living flesh. A possibility which the day before had filled her with a sweet and holy joy, now added to her agony the ghastliness of an awful fear. She closed her hot eyes and lapsed into a physical quiet that lasted for hours, her mind all the more alive and in writhing pain.

On and on sped the train. Night began to drop down, and the brakeman came through the car, climbing on a board placed on the ends of two seats to light the lamps. Stations were called out, passengers came and went, but Mary shrinking in her corner heard nothing. She shed no tears, she made no sound. She traced the matter back, excusing herself not at all, to the first wrong step—the mistake of not telling the doctor and Mrs. Sheldon about the young man. She remembered well her impulse to do so, and how she had not followed it. It was a hideous blunder—a sin too great to be forgiven. Yes, a sin—she would not spare herself. In her self-arraignment she made no allowance for her maidenly modesty, nor for the habit of reserve that had grown upon her through years of loneliness. She did not remember that the undemonstrative ways of the doctor and his wife had made it almost impossible for her to speak. She saw only the mistake, the sin. It loomed up enormous, colossal, through the distorting mists of her shame and sorrow. Earth was ashes before her, and Heaven was brass above her. She had always prayed before—prayed about everything. Now, the thought of God was an added agony.

If she had been a man and not a girl, a girl, too, into the very fiber of whose life had been woven the profound belief that God is good—if she had been a man and ten years older, she would have fiercely arraigned God for bringing this trouble upon her. She would have told Him to His face that He had been a poor guide, a false father to her. She would have asked Him how, even if she had done wrong in not speaking, He could permit the one little error of an

ignorant girl to bring upon her such awful, eternal ruin! She would have demanded to know where His promised love and care were, that He had let her blindly fall into this lowest hell. Thoughts like these did indeed force their way into her mind, but she crushed them back with a last effort of her will. Suffering—such suffering as this—could mean but one thing—sin! As was the depth of her pain, so was—so must be—the depth of her sin. God was angry with her, but righteously so. The fault was all her own—she would not now commit the supreme sacrilege of trying to throw the responsibility of it off on Him. No, suffer as she might, God was good. Mother said that with her dying breath. He was a holy God, and could not endure evil. She clung desperately to her childhood traditions and prayed in an agony to be delivered from this last temptation; and soon her involuntary questionings died away. They returned many times in the months that followed, but she met, and, as she herself would have said, conquered them with the steadfast rejoinder, "God is good—God is good."

But for the present she was utterly without hope and without desire. She drew one breath after another only because she could not stop breathing. She thought again she must be dying, but again she did not fear nor even wish, concerning death.

Suddenly the sound of a familiar name rang in her ears. The train was stopping and the brakeman was shouting loudly, "Oak View! Oak View!" It was the name of the large manufacturing town nearest Westland on the east. Mary knew it well; she had more than once visited it with the doctor on his professional

rides and she understood instantly that the train she was on must be going through Westland. Yes, it was the old "seven o'clock express" that she had watched as a little girl hundreds of times from the kitchen window of her mother's house. How happy it had always seemed as it thundered past—flags waving, or lights gleaming! How many times she had wished she might go with it to fairy-land! She was going with it now, but to—what?

The seven o'clock express never stopped at Westland, but with face pressed against the glass Mary could trace the familiar form of the old Pinnacle and the low range of hills beyond, dark against the still dimly lighted sky. She knew just how the town lay—just where the doctor's house was, over there. Melissa was "doing up" the supper dishes, with Ira sitting by, warming his stockinged feet by the kitchen stove, and his heart by glimpses of Melissa. And the doctor and his wife in the sitting-room—she could almost see them all! Now the train was coming into the town—surely it was slacking speed. Mary sat, her face still pressed against the glass, her eyes strained, and a look on her face such as a lost spirit might wear, as going down it catches its last glimpse of Heaven. Now the train was creeping past her old home, her mother's house. Up on the street which the little home fronted, she could make out but dimly the outlines of the house, but the back alley and the fence, with a pile of accumulated rubbish lying against it, were plainly visible in the lights of the car which shone brightly out. Some of the pickets were broken out of the fence and the back gate was gone. And what was that? Her old wooden hobby-horse lying on

the rubbish heap! Its one front leg was still stuck out at her in the old attitude of sad protest! It was but a glimpse in the moving light, but it was photographed forever on Mary's brain. Poor, dear old Prince!

The girl burst into violent, saving weeping. The scorching current of her thoughts was broken, and mingling with them were memories of her childhood and her mother. She remembered her morning rides out into the great world on Prince's jaunty back with its shining red saddle. She was out in the great world in earnest now.

There were few people in the car, and the suffering girl had a seat to herself. Two or three of her near neighbors looked at her pitifully, and an old lady in the seat behind, hearing her long-continued sobs, leaned over and spoke to her, but could get no response. After midnight Mary grew quieter from sheer exhaustion. She had slept none the night before, and had eaten little for days. She felt herself sinking into unconsciousness—sleep or death.

But what about her evening prayer? Could she pray? Yet she had promised mother. Oh, mother never thought of such a thing as this. Yet she had promised. Well, she would say, "Now I lay me." Everybody said that. She put her hand up over her face, an attitude that in some way stood in her mind as indicating reverence, and whispered the words of the old prayer. Then her head and body dropped over helpless on the seat, and unconsciousness came.

Mary faced the gray light of the next day of travel in a state of physical wretchedness which for the time excluded all thought. The grip of long-continued bodily pain is imperative in its immediate demands.

She was cramped and sore and chilled to the bone. Her head seemed bursting with pain, and she could not raise it from its pillowless rest on the car seat without sickening faintness. Low groans burst from her lips.

Presently she felt someone taking kind hold of her cold hand and saw a wrinkled face bending over her. It was the little old lady, who, curled up in the seat just behind Mary, had passed a not uncomfortable night in the midst of her shawls and bundles. Her gray hairs and look of anxious sympathy won Mary's confidence. The next moment a soft bundle was slipped under the head of the wretched girl by way of a pillow, her cramped feet were lifted from the floor to a relieving rest on a "telescope" and a large soft shawl was spread over her and carefully tucked in. Mary tried feebly to protest, but was met with a decided "There, there, child! 'Tain't no use to say a single word. You've got to be took care of, and I'm a-goin' to do it."

Her new friend now held an animated discussion over her head with a reluctant brakeman. Mary overheard, "Let him bring it as medicine, then! That ain't against your rules, is it?" and caught the glint of a silver coin. Pretty soon a dignified waiter came in from some unknown region back among the trailing sleepers, his coat as white as his face was black. He brought a little tray with coffee and hot water. The good woman knelt in the narrow space by Mary's seat, and little by little persuaded her to drink the hot water, and later the coffee. Then with many motherly explanations and exhortations she made Mary eat from her own well-stocked lunch box.

"It'll do you good, my dear. You didn't have a

bite of supper last night. I know, 'cause I got on at Boston, same's you did. I can't never go without supper either, without a sick headache"—though she knew all the time it was a sick heartache. "Eatin' helps wonderfully, my dear—just plain common eatin' and drinkin'. We've all got to eat, jest as long as we live here on earth. Sairy put up twice as much lunch as I could possibly eat. 'It'll come in handy for some one, Mis' Small,' says she; and I'm real glad it has. Here's another little, *teenty* bit of chicken? Do you good, if you could eat it. Shall have to throw it away if you don't."

Then when the meal was finished, Mary's position was changed again to relieve the cramps, the shawl was tucked in more carefully and she was exhorted to "go right to sleep."

"No, I shan't want the shawl, nor a single rag o' them things," said her friend. "Glad to get 'em out o' my seat. Yes, I'm going to Chicago, or 'most there, and I'll watch that there don't nothin' happen to you."

Mary slept heavily most of the day, and when she wakened there came to her a calmness at which she herself was astonished. The fountain of her feelings was thoroughly exhausted. Her life, as she keenly realized, was utterly changed and broken. She was cut off forever from her beautiful youth, with its hopes and joys. But under the awful pressure she suddenly felt something of the fortitude that marked her mother's character stirring to life within her. She perceived that she must live on, and she determined to live decently and bravely. She would accept her lot uncomplainingly. She felt sure she could get work in

Chicago. The very completeness of the transition helped her. She had literally nothing to connect her with her past save the clothes she wore. It was as if she had been newborn into a strange world.

Her new friend hovered about her. She seemed highly gratified at her improved condition and insisted on again sharing her lunch with her.

"I've jes' ben a-waitin' till you woke up for comp'ny. Seems so heathenish to set and eat all alone," she declared. And Mary could not refuse.

Mrs. Small left the train at Hammond, where she had a married daughter living. But her sheltering care continued to the last.

"Now, my dear," she counseled, "I ain't never been in Chicago—'Randy was married only last year, an' this is my first visit to her—but it stands to reason it's jes' like other cities. Now, when the train gets in, just you perk up and walk right up to a p'liceman and say, says you, 'Will you direct me to a good hotel on the European plan?' 'Cause you know, my dear, you can get your meals a great deal cheaper at a restaurant than you can at a hotel. And you'd better tell him, too, that while you want it to be respectable it mustn't be one o' them fancy-priced places. He'll understand. An' then when he tells you where to go, jest ask him to show you to a cab stand. You'll have to take a cab, bein' as it's a strange city and in the night. But be sure and inquire the price of the cab 'fore you get into it. Them fellers'll cheat the soles right off your shoes, if you don't. If 'Randy wasn't sick I'd jest have you stop with me till mornin', but"—as Mary shook her head—"you'll get along as fine as a fiddle. An' then in the mornin' when you

want your breakfast you must ask a p'liceman where to go. It's always safe to ask a p'liceman, but it ain't always safe to ask other folks. And if ever you want a friend, my dear, write to me. Hammond ain't only a little ways from Chicago, and I would be real pleased to have you come down and see me some time."

Upon reaching Chicago that night, Mary carefully followed the directions of her friend. Then, safe in the hotel, she got a sheet of paper and an envelope from the office and wrote a constrained letter to the doctor. She did not call him "uncle." She felt herself too degraded for such a liberty. She told him in a few words that she had gone from Boston, and that she hoped they would all forget her. She thanked him and Mrs. Sheldon and Melissa and Ira and even sent a word of thanks to Stephen for all the kindness they had shown her. She begged the doctor not to try to find her, as the effort would only increase her pain. She told him her property was gone, but gave him no clue as to what had become of it. She asked him to care at once for the things left at Boston. Of "Jules" she said no word. She hardly thought of him. Her feelings had not, at any time since her escape, been directed definitely towards him in resentment or even indignation. They had rather been concerned with the awful catastrophe that had befallen her; as, when lightning has struck a house and it is on fire, one does not think of the lightning, but of his home, burning before his eyes. She signed the letter, "Your lost Mary." She was afraid to go out in the dark to mail it, so she laid it on the table ready for the morning. Then she knelt by her bed and tried to pray. It suddenly occurred to her that it was Sunday, and that

she had spent all the holy day in travel. This seemed to her another unpardonable sin. Oh, how dared she pray? Yet she had promised mother.

She sprang to her feet. Another fearful outburst of feeling seemed upon her, but she was too worn out to struggle. Weariness begot apathy and she crept into bed where with slow dull tears wetting the pillow she whispered her, "Now I lay me." She had said that once, she remembered, and the wrath of God had not burst out to sear her polluted lips. It should be her prayer—the way she would keep her promise.

The next morning, just before she sealed and posted the letter, she scratched over the "your" of the closing words and wrote "the," so that it read, "The lost Mary." Then she paid her hotel bill at the office and went out into the streets of the great city. It did not seem like a dream any longer. The suffering had been too deep, too horribly real.

CHAPTER XII

IN A "DEPARTMENT STORE"

Smith and Smiths' "Department Store" is, according to its owners' statement, "Earth's Emperial Emporium." If orthography must yield before the attractions of a "Kandy Kitchen," for instance, how could we expect it to hold its own under the weight of the greatness of Smith and Smiths' store? The immense roof of this institution shelters tons of dry goods and swarms of humanity, distributed over three acres of floor space. Under it one can buy, it is claimed, anything that can possibly be wanted by any human being during any period of his life. If a man should inquire of the fluent floor-walker at any of the many entrances, at what counter elephants were displayed for sale, or on what floor Texas farms could be purchased, the answer would be promptly forthcoming. The customer might possibly be requested to "wait till to-morrow—there had been a run on elephants, and the House was just out. But a choice assortment of the article would be ready very soon."

There is a story afloat concerning this same department store: A man and his wife, just moving to Chicago, stepped in one morning to do a little shopping. They began by purchasing a house and lot in the suburbs. Then, with a natural desire for comfortable occupancy that night, the lady bought the furnishings complete, including wallpaper and carpets,

which it was arranged should be put on the walls and floors by workmen dispatched from the house the instant the purchase was made. A full supply of groceries was also laid in, that housekeeping might begin immediately. Complete suits of clothing for the children were examined and purchased, and some toys for the baby. Then the couple went to the dental rooms of the house, where, under the influence of an anesthetic the lady's defective teeth were extracted and orders given for an artificial set. By the time the gentleman had had glasses fitted to his eyes by the firm's oculists and opticians, it was dinner time, and the two were shown to the dining-room on the sixth floor. But before the gentleman could finish his dessert a sharp illness overcame him. The physician from the medical office in the house was immediately summoned, but in spite of every effort known to medical science, poor Mr. A. succumbed almost instantly to a hitherto unsuspected heart trouble.

There was not the slightest embarrassment about the matter, however. He could not have left the world under more thoroughly convenient surroundings. Telegrams to friends were instantly dispatched from the Western Union's office in the building. The remains were removed to the morgue in the sub-basement, and the coroner was summoned by telephone. A coffin and other necessities were supplied from another part of the store, and the afflicted wife was assisted by elaborate plats and a large number of landscape photographs to select just the proper family lot in Hope cemetery for the burial. In the monument department of the store she bought a stone for the head of the grave, and before she left she was fitted to

a complete mourning outfit, tailor made and crêpe trimmed.

Smith and Smiths' employ upwards of four thousand souls—men, women and children. There is a compulsory educational law in Chicago, but of the two hundred and fifty thousand children in the twenty-four central wards of the city between the ages of six and fourteen, only about one-half are in school. There is another law which forbids the employment of children under fourteen without emergency permission, but there are thousands of such children in the stores and factories of the city. The better class of institutions are careful that legal permission shall be obtained in each case, with the result that with them only children are employed to whom the work is a real necessity for their own sakes or the sake of their friends—a widowed or deserted mother usually. But there are other places, and Smith and Smiths' is one of them, whose methods in employing children are entirely lawless. In these places there are sometimes toiling children only seven or eight years old. These tots carry home from forty cents to a dollar above their street-car fare, in return for a week's work that would be confining for a man.

There are bargain counters innumerable at Smith and Smiths'. At one, articles usually sold at one dollar may be put down to ninety-five cents—"for this day only, and only one sold to one person." At another, articles usually sold at twenty-five cents may quite as often be offered at thirty cents, likewise "for this day only, and only one sold to one person." The daily papers are flaming—the advertisement department—with convincing statements concerning the unselfish

philanthropy of this firm, who are buying at one hundred per cent, and selling at seventy-five, simply and only for the benefit of the public.

The utmost system and order prevail at Smith and Smiths'. It would be impossible to handle the firm's vast business otherwise. Even the Christmas rush is carefully planned for. From early in the morning until ten o'clock at night, those days, everyone stands at his post. A half-hour is allowed for the noon meal, taken by the employés in relays, and there are twenty minutes at night for lunch. Conspicuously posted everywhere is the fact that the store is open during this season from eight in the morning till ten at night, for the accommodation of late customers. Smith and Smiths' are very accommodating to the public.

Mary faced the first day of her life in Chicago with her capacity for suffering renewed by sleep. But she resolutely refused to be submerged by the waves of sorrow which beat upon her, and at once determined to look for work. Just before the holidays there is much demand for additional help in all shops, and Mary, entering Smith and Smiths' to purchase some immediately necessary toilet articles, noticed by a little sign in a window, that "salesladies" were wanted. A man was walking about slowly, looking here and there. He evidently belonged to the store, and Mary inquired of him about the matter.

"At the foot of the aisle, under the staircase," said he, pointing to the other end of the store.

The "aisle" was obscured by ribbon and laces draped showily across it, and Mary saw no stairway. It was quite clear, however, that the great man considered his time too precious to be wasted in giving further

information, and Mary started on. She walked half the length of the store, then inquired of a pleasant faced girl dusting off one of the counters, who kindly showed her the place. About twenty girls were standing in line before a small window, behind which in a little apartment sat a man, pencil in hand. The daylight was dim under the great staircase, but many electric lights were burning. Mary took her place at the end of the line, but her heart fell as she looked at the other girls. Most of them were better dressed than she, with bits of ribbon here and there and an air of smartness which she felt she lacked. Some of them, however, seemed very poor. Mary noticed one especially—the third in front of her. She had a pale, sallow face and she coughed nervously. The upper part of her shoes spread far out over the soles as she stood in line, and they were ragged at the heels beneath her short skirt. The man worked rapidly. The sallow-faced girl was met with an instant, "We don't want you. Move on." She went away crying.

The man took Mary in at a glance when her turn came. She was very pale and her dress was somber, but her eyes glowed with a steady light, and she carried herself with an unconsciously striking air of culture and composure, which the man instantly perceived would be "taking" with customers. Her face was attractive, too, even in its seriousness.

"Any experience?" he asked her, in a quick voice.

"No, sir," said Mary, "but I think I can do it."

"You can try. What is your name?"

"Mary—"

She hesitated. The thought of being obliged to tell her name had not before entered her mind. But now—

what if Le Cygne should follow—try to find her. How easily he could do it if her name were known! She sickened in fear.

"Mary what?" asked the man sharply. She had not a moment to think.

"Mary South."

The man made an entry in the book open before him.

"Report to Mr. Mallory, at the ribbon counter," said he.

"What wages do you pay?" said Mary.

"Three dollars a week and one per cent."

He lifted his head and glared at her. The electric light, shining through the net work behind which he stood, made iron figures on his irritated face.

Mary dared not speak further. Sorely disappointed at the smallness of the sum she moved away. She had been enrolled, and she supposed she was engaged. But three dollars a week! It would not pay her board. Oh, it must include board. Then there was the mysterious "one per cent." That must be something additional. At any rate it was better than to be idle. She would take it for a week or so.

Mr. Mallory, at the ribbon counter, was not hard to find. He turned Mary over, with hardly a look, to a group of girls behind a counter, telling them to "take care of her."

The nearest of the group, a large, light-haired girl, rather older than the others, came forward at once. Greeting Mary pleasantly, she took her to the crowded, ill-smelling dressing-rooms, in which Mary hung up her newly-purchased wraps. Then they went back. It was still early, and there were few customers.

"What is your name?" said her new friend.

"Mary—they call me Mary South."

"Well, mine is Sadie Spencer. I'm glad they're giving us some more girls, for we were nearly killed last week."

Sadie introduced her to the others in the group. They called each other by their first names, and seemed very kind. Mary was instructed as to the price of the ribbons, and told how to use her check book and how to "send up" the goods. It seemed complicated.

"Suppose I should make a mistake?" she asked of Sadie.

"Well, that depends. If you make a mistake on the side of the House, it don't matter. But if the House loses you have to make it up out of your wages, and very likely be discharged besides."

"What does the 'one per cent' mean?"

"Why, don't you know? It's commission. On every dollar's worth we sell we get one cent."

"Oh! And do we sell much?"

"Hear her, girls," laughed Vinnie Marsh, a much younger girl, very pretty. "She wants to know if we sell much. We sell all we can, greenie, and we have a hard time to live then."

Mary devoted herself to conning over the prices of the ribbons. The girls chatted about many things—what they had to eat, their beaux, the theaters. But the subject of conversation most absorbing to all was how much money they could make, and how they could live on their earnings.

"How much commission did you make last week, Lou?" asked Vinnie.

"Only a dollar thirteen," was the reply. "I don't

know what I'm going to do. I just can't live decently on four dollars a week."

"Oh, well, we'll all do better this week," said Sadie, comfortingly.

"How much did you make, Sadie?" returned Lou.

"I made two seventy-three. But you know I've been here a year."

"You get four dollars to begin with," said Lou, enviously.

"Yes, but I didn't at first, my sweet child. Not till November. I had to work up, just as you will."

"You live at home," replied Lou. "That's where your advantage comes in."

"That's so," said Sadie. "Evvie and I often say to ourselves we don't see how you girls can live at all and pay board."

Evvie was Sadie's sister, employed at the lining's counter.

"Tell you what, girls," said Vinnie. "I'm not living—I'm dying. I owe everybody I can borrow a cent of"—one of the girls, evidently a victim, made a grimace of assent—"and I don't know what I am going to do. I am really frantic when I think of it." Her face showed keen distress.

"Oh, don't worry," said Lou, lightly. "We're going to be rushed now till after Christmas, and our commission will lift us all out of the dumps."

The girls were sociable and confiding, and Mary soon learned much of the life of a shop-girl. She found that the average wages of the ordinary girls of this House the first year, including commission, were not more than four and a half dollars a week. This did not include board. Inquiring a few days later

about wages in a dry goods house farther along on the street, she learned that they were considerably higher.

"And they don't work their girls to death, neither, the way Smith and Smiths' do," said Vinnie, who was giving her the information. "They're 'way up, every way. But the getting into those houses! It ain't a peachy job, not a little bit. You might about as well try to get into Heaven."

Vinnie told Mary about the boarding-house where with many of the other girls she lived at an expense of only $2.50 a week.

"We do our washing in the washbasin at night," Vinnie explained. "I couldn't live at all if I paid anything out for laundry. We have to dress just so, you know, or off go our little heads. I can see my own rolling in gore every time Mallory frowns at me."

She shook her pretty crimps, not at all gory yet, with a becoming air of resignation.

"Do you think they will take me," asked Mary, "at your boarding-house?"

"Course they will. There's an empty bed in our room. You come along with me to-night, and I'll introduce you to Mrs. Turner."

Customers came more frequently and there was soon little time for talking. Mary made her first sale, Sadie assisting her. She felt more confidence after that, and soon the list of sales on the cover of her check book began to grow. Mr. Mallory walked past occasionally, looking at everything with lowering brows. The girls evidently trembled till he was quite out of sight.

"He's cross to-day," whispered Lou, in fear. "He's always cross Mondays."

By noon Mary's feet began to ache with the unaccustomed standing. A gong sounded and a relay of the girls, Sadie with them guiding Mary, went to the lunch room. The half hour's rest was needed by the tired girl, even more than the bowl of soup and slice of bread and butter for which she paid ten cents. Returning to her work, she soon found herself suffering greatly with pain in her feet and limbs. There was no chair or stool behind the counter, nothing on which one could rest. In a moment of leisure she leaned forward, resting her hands on the counter, to relieve her aching feet.

"Stand up, Miss South," said a sharp voice at her side. Turning she saw Mr. Mallory.

"We don't allow any lying 'round on counters at Smith and Smiths'. If folks are too lazy to stand up they ain't wanted here," said he, coarsely.

Mary stood silent. Her face whitened to the lips.

Before night came she was in agony with the pain in her feet and the cramp-like drawing of her limbs. If she had gone into the work under any other circumstances she would have given it up. But it seemed to her a type of the hard life she was entering—a test of her ability to meet it. Failure here meant to her failure everywhere, so with teeth set she endured. The girls were all suffering, especially Vinnie who complained piteously. She was a delicate little thing, with a peach-like face and small hands and feet. She had come from a little Wisconsin town where her father lived with his second wife. There were other children and Vinnie said she could not live at home. She was having a very hard time of it to live anywhere. She had been at Smith and Smiths' only three weeks.

The floorwalker was omnipresent. He was a middle-aged man, small and stoop-shouldered. His face was thin and he wore a bristly iron gray moustache. His head was bald and his face had the yellowish-gray pallor that comes of long breathing of bad air and eating of greasy food. His nose was long and large, the fullness in the middle running down into the cheeks. His looks seemed more hawk-like, his frown more threatening as the hard day wore on.

At last ten o'clock came, the crowd of customers thinned, and the gong sounded for closing. There was still the covering up—gray dust-cloths to be drawn over the counters,—but Sadie interfered.

"You go 'long," said she, with rough kindness, as Mary and Vinnie limped about trying to help.

A moment at the cloak-room sufficed for the wraps and the satchel bought in the morning, which held all Mary's possessions. Then she went with Vinnie to the large boarding-house, only two or three blocks away. On Vinnie's introduction she was received without any formality and at once given a little iron bed, fairly clean but stale of smell, in the room where Vinnie and four other girls slept in similar beds. The girls were almost too tired to undress—they were the last comers. Mary could have gone to sleep in abject weariness, but Vinnie was sobbing hopelessly on her cot—she was only seventeen. The sound set Mary crying, too. But pretty soon she crushed back her own sobs, got up and went over to the bed of the suffering girl, which was next to hers.

"What's the matter, Vinnie?" she whispered, bending over her.

'Oh, my feet, and everything! I wish I was dead."

Mary stood a moment saying nothing. Then she pushed her own cot over so that it touched Vinnie's, and lay down again. She stretched her hand over to Vinnie's shaking form with little pats of sympathy for which she could find no words. The girl clutched the friendly hand. It comforted her. She stopped crying and they both slept heavily, till the coarse clang of a rising bell awakened them.

"Oh, we must get up," said Vinnie, sleepily. She turned over and went fast asleep again.

Mary's watch from under her pillow told her it was after six. She rose at once, getting the first turn at the one tin washbasin that had to serve, she found, for all in the room. It was ten minutes before she could coax her blistered feet into her shoes. She was lame and sore, but with dogged determination she prepared for the day. If she could not endure Smith and Smiths' she could not hope to succeed anywhere. Other girls live through it, so would she.

The others in the room aroused one by one, and with groanings and chatterings began to dress. Some of them were cross. There were quarrels for the washbasin, and for the one kerosene lamp in the chimney of which they all heated their curling irons. Vinnie roused at last, and scrambled out of bed.

"I slept like a top," announced she, quite her old happy self. "It was awfully sweet in you, Mamie, to care last night. I did the baby act, I know. I think every night I'm a dead chicken, but I'm getting used to it. I made more yesterday than any day yet."

She groaned, however, and made a suffering face as she put on her shoes.

Vinnie's turn at the lamp and the curling iron

came late, as she was the last one up. Mary noticed the odor of something scorching.

"Heavens!" cried Vinnie. "I'm burning the hair all off my head." She plunged the iron viciously into the water in the washbasin. "I'll be late, I know."

"Yes," said one of the girls, resignedly. "I burned mine all off the other day. See! Can't hardly get hold of it now."

Vinnie finished her hair, then discovered a button off her waist.

"Oh, Mamie," cried she. "Do sew this on for me. I'm all coming to pieces. I'll get the bounce if that button's off, and I'm going to be late, I know. That means another dime for the tiger."

Mary sewed on the button, and Vinnie finally fussed through her toilet—little combs, blue ribbon at the throat, somewhat soiled but smart.

The breakfast of fried potatoes and bread and butter—Mary thought it was butter—with black coffee and watery milk, was gulped down, as Vinnie was in mortal terror of being late. Then they went almost on a run to the store, reaching their stations ready for work just as the gong sounded. Sadie was already there. Lou came a minute later, but with a frowning face.

"That old wretch has docked me again," said she. "He's a regular she-devil. I'd like to season his soup for him some day."

"Sh!" said Sadie, warningly. The floor-walker was approaching.

"Good morning, ladies," said he. "Morning, Miss Spencer—Miss South."

He seemed in very good humor. Glancing at Vin-

nie he suddenly stopped for a second look. Her cheeks were flushed with the rush to the store. Her full red lips were smiling, her eyes sparkling and some little escaped ringlets of her crimped hair had blown over one of her delicately formed ears. She was an attractive girl, in the morning especially.

"Good morning, Miss Marsh," said he. "Did you get rested last night?"

Vinnie colored with pleasure.

"Oh, yes," said she, brightly. "I'm as fresh as a daisy this morning."

"Indeed! You look it. Well, Christmas is almost here, and then the work won't be so hard."

With another admiring look he passed on.

"Wonders of wonders!" gasped Vinnie as soon as he was safely out of earshot. "Mallory actually smiled at me!"

"I'd rather he'd fine me any day than smile at me," said Sadie.

The day passed much like the one before — then day after day. The girls went home at night tired to the utmost limit of endurance, but the soreness in their feet was lessening. They were "getting used to it." Saturday night they all lined up at the window to receive their pay. Mary had earned four dollars and sixty cents; Vinnie not quite so much. Sunday they lay in bed all day, getting up only for meals. It was all that saved them from utter collapse in the days that followed. Once or twice in a wakeful moment Mary felt a weak impulse to get up and go to church, but she was asleep again before the thought could be put into execution. None of those about her even so much as thought of church. Sunday meant

nothing in this new world, but a rest day or a holiday.

After the lights were out that night, however, Mary lay awake a long time, wretchedly absorbed in what she would have called "self-examination." Her deliberate conclusion was that she had "backslidden"—had "trampled under foot the grace of God." She had desecrated these two Sabbaths; she had not read a word in the Bible for days—indeed, she had no Bible—and she had not prayed, save only the dull repeating of the childish rhyme to keep literally her promise to her mother. Well, it was what might have been expected—one sin leads to another. She had passed the stages of acute suffering and her greatest pain now came from a curious horror that she could give it all up so easily. Mother? Well, mother was gone—that's all there was about it. Hell? She remembered about hell as she remembered her arithmetic lessons—how two and two make four. But hell meant to her now not so much as that two and two make four. It is the living body, not the dead one that flinches at the knife.

Mary determined that she would no longer be guilty of the mockery of even the childish prayer. But as her eyelids drooped the sweet words repeated themselves almost automatically through her mind. "I pray the Lord—my soul to keep." She could not possibly cease to pray.

And not only night by night, but day by day Mary prayed. It was no longer the sweet "upward glancing of an eye," in gratitude or petition as in the old happy days, but a constant, unconscious, dumb up-reaching of soul, and with never any touch of

response, as great mountain peaks point ever to a silent sky.

Mary was much thrown with the vivacious Vinnie. She pitied and despised her by turns, but ended by becoming interested in her. She was a superficial little thing, but bright and lovable; and she promptly attached herself to Mary with a childlike dependence. She *would* kiss her, she *would* call her "Mame" and "Mamie," and she *would* borrow money of her.

Swept into this maelstrom of new interests, Mary seemed to herself to be another person. She lived like one in a dream. Still it was a very absorbing dream, and sometimes it seemed to her that the other life—her old beautiful girlhood—that *that* was the dream, this dumb agony the only reality she had ever known.

Mr. Mallory was noticeably kinder to the ribbon girls. He often stopped to chat a moment with one or another, most often with Vinnie. She was late once, but he did not fine her. She did not boast of her escape though—some woman's instinct told her she had better not do so.

A few days before Christmas a heavy snow storm set in, and customers were noticeably few. At six o'clock the word was passed around that all the employés whose names began with the letters of the first half of the alphabet might have the evening off. Half of the "hands" could handle the business.

"It just lets me out," cried Vinnie in delight. "Too bad for you, Mamie. But your turn'll come next."

"I'm glad you can go, dear," said Mary, generously. "Go to bed early, and get a good rest."

"Indeed, I will," said Vinnie. "I believe I could sleep a week."

The side door at which the employés left the building was in full view of the ribbon counter, and Mary, happening to glance that way, noticed Mr. Mallory lingering near, coat on, hat in hand. His name began with a letter from the first half of the alphabet, too. Vinnie came along soon. Mr. Mallory spoke to her, and they went out together.

When Mary reached the room that evening Vinnie was not there. She came in two hours later, a red rose at her belt, her face bright with excitement.

"Oh, Mamie!" she whispered—quiet in the bedroom at night was almost the only stringent rule of the house—"I've had such a glorious time; fun enough to last a year!"

"Why, where have you been?" said Mary.

"To the theater—Lotkins. Saw a French play. They say it is pretty bad, but gee! it was killing fun! I never laughed so much in my life. Then we had a little dinner—oysters and celery and ice-cream. Oh, Mamie, I wish you'd been there."

"Why, how could you? It must have cost a great deal. You surely didn't—"

"Sh!" said Vinnie. "That's a big secret. I promised I wouldn't tell. I'll tell you, though." She put her lips down close to Mary's ear. "Mr. Mallory took me. He stood the whole treat. He's real nice, Mame—not half such a bear as we thought."

"Why, he's a married man!" said Mary, aghast. "His wife came into the store to speak to him the other day. I saw her—that big woman—don't you remember?"

"I don't care," pouted Vinnie. "I don't see any harm in his giving us girls a good time now and then. He says we ought to have a little fun once in a while."

"A little fun!" Mary's heart contracted at the well-remembered phrase. Terror-stricken she threw her arms around the girl's neck and drew her down.

"Oh, Vinnie!" she said. "Don't go with him. I'm glad you're home safe. Oh, Vinnie, I'm sure it's dangerous. He's a bad man."

"I don't know what you mean, Mame South," said Vinnie, loosing herself from the clinging arms. "What do you think of me, I'd like to know? Don't you s'pose I've cut my eye teeth? Mr. Mallory's got more compassion than you have. You'd never let a girl have a bit of life—slaving away in that old prison, and eating this hash-house diet. But, oh, I see"—an unpleasant smile came over her face—"you're mad because he didn't ask you."

"No, no, Vinnie," pleaded Mary, too much alarmed for the girl to mind the insult. "It's not that. You know it's not that. I couldn't have got off anyway. But it isn't the thing—don't you know it isn't the thing to go to the theater with a married man? What would Sadie say? And all the girls?"

"Oh, they'd be mad as hornets—same as you. But you won't tell them? Please, Mame. I'll never tell you anything again as long as I live."

"No, I won't tell; that is, if you won't go again. Oh, Vinnie, you *mustn't* go again! Promise me you won't have anything more to do with that man. You know it's wrong."

"Well—maybe not. But you don't know, Mame, you're such a solemn old thing—you don't know how

horrid it is, just to drudge and grind—never to have a bit of fun day in and day out. And I just love music and flowers and all that. And there isn't a bit of harm in it, not a scratch! But he won't ask me again anyway."

She rose with a sigh and made ready for bed, bracing up the drooping rose in some water in the wash-basin.

The next morning Vinnie would not hurry, and Mary had to leave her behind. She came fifteen minutes late, but again she was not fined. She wore the red rose in her hair, and in spite of her promise and Mary's anxious looks, she smiled bewitchingly at the floor-walker—she was a born coquette. He had a flower, too, in his buttonhole, and seemed very good natured and gallant.

There were no more evenings off. The days and nights were a wild rush of impatient customers and hurrying, worn-out clerks. Cash girls ran, floor-walkers frowned and snapped—Mr. Mallory with the rest—and everybody worked at top tension. The ribbon girls had little time for gossip. But their commission was piling up. Vinnie cleared more than six dollars that week. She paid up several of her dime debts, and purchased a new neck ribbon. Once or twice she bought carnations for the hair—she was passionately fond of flowers. More than once, too, she had roses that she did not buy, and the smiling greetings between her and Mr. Mallory continued. Mary was not alone in noticing them.

"You're a fool, Vinnie!" said Sadie Spencer one morning after the girl had almost openly accepted a flower from the floor-walker's hand. "That man'll

make you dance to his fiddling one of these days if you don't look out."

"Oh, you shut up!" retorted Vinnie. "Do you think I dropped out of the sky yesterday? Why shouldn't he furnish the go-goes once in a while?"

"He'll make you furnish the go-goes one of these days. Come, Vin, give him the cold shoulder. Think of Nellie Mertle."

"I saw her riding in a carriage with Mr. Smith yesterday," replied Vinnie, "all dressed up swell. Fur collarette, diamond ear-rings—hat just too sweet for anything—driver in livery! And they drove straight up and stopped in front of Kingston's. Yum! Yum!"

"Oh, tommy rot!" retorted Sadie. "Anybody'd think you didn't know what it all means. When you talk that way, Vin, I more'n half believe you ain't fit for a decent girl to speak to already."

Mary, busy with a customer, overheard every word. A chill struck her. Would Sadie speak to *her* if she knew? What a hypocrite she was! She had never thought of herself in that way before, but now she knew she could never, never again think of herself any other way.

"Oh, Sadie, don't be hard on me," said Vinnie, almost crying. "You don't know how 'tis with us girls—you live at home and have somebody—and have some comfort and something nice to eat. You can't imagine how 'tis, Sadie. And I ain't a fool. I can take care of number one, I reckon."

"I know it's hard," replied the fortunate girl who lived at home, "and I know I don't know *how* hard it is, but there's one thing I do know—there are some

things a mighty sight harder. And if you don't look out, you'll have a taste of 'em, too, pretty soon. Come, brace up, Vinnie. Is your backbone made of cooky dough?"

"Well, I'll be careful. I really will. Just to make you stop your fussing, if nothing else."

But Vinnie wore the red rose all day.

CHAPTER XIII

A CHRISTMAS DAY

Christmas came at last. The store was closed, of course. Mary knew Mr. Mallory would be at his home, and so she had a day of respite from fear for Vinnie. The girls spent the morning again in bed—the boarding-house had no parlor. Mary tried to sleep—she was literally almost paralyzed with weariness—but the thoughts held in half check so long came on, this day of leisure, like storm clouds driven by a hurricane—thoughts of the past and a fearsome thought of the future. She was sure now that it was coming to her—what she had feared. Oh, the shame of it! Then, worst of all, how could she seem to be trying to save Vinnie, when she herself was living this double life. "Hypocrite! Hypocrite!" she groaned to herself. But even with the thought came a desperate determination to go right on with her horrible hypocrisy—to keep hold of Vinnie at all cost, till in some way she was safe. "I still have five or six months," she thought. "Then I can drop out of her life as suddenly as I came into it." Sometimes it seemed to her that this was why she had been permitted to make such shipwreck of her own life—that she might save Vinnie. "A life for a life," came often into her mind.

Of what would become of herself she thought but vaguely. She must in some way save a little money. Then she supposed there would be some hospital or

other institution; and, in spite of a shuddering sense of the wickedness of the thought, she could not but hope that at the end of all there would be a friendly grave. So all this Christmas morning she lay in a half waking nightmare of physical exhaustion and mental distress.

After dinner she again threw herself on her bed. She heard Vinnie and the other girls planning a "lark," but she did not speak. How old she seemed to herself in comparison with these young things! Yet she was only eighteen. They were going to enjoy themselves. She—ah, every breath was a heaviness. And this was Christmas!

What were they doing at home? Oh, how could she live on! She shed no tears, but her form shook with quick catches of breath that were like sobs. It would have been better for the suffering girl if the burden of anxiety about Vinnie had not been lifted even for that brief day.

The unseeing girls, Vinnie with them, went off to the matinee. The moment their chatter died away down the hall Mary sprang from her cot. It had become to her like a bed of fire. She must do something. She dressed hurriedly and went out into the gaily decorated streets. It was a brilliant winter afternoon. The storm had left much snow on the ground and the gay sleighs were out on the avenues—bells jingling, ribbons flying, statue-like drivers and footmen in livery, glimpses of bright faces, and once in a while a note of overflowing laughter.

The wind was strong from the north. Mary turned towards it, longing instinctively for the relief which a physical pain would bring. She walked miles, thrust-

ing her fingers into her jacket pockets or tucking them up under her waist to keep them from freezing. She crossed a bridge to the north side. As she struggled on with her head down she almost ran into a woman who stood bewildered on a street corner. She was a little old creature, her head and shoulders wound about with a black knit wrap, her light cotton skirts flying back from her old limbs like a flag of distress in the bitter wind. Her hair was as white as snow and her face was twisted in misery. She stood holding before her one of her wrists in the other hand. The wrist was badly swollen.

"Why, what's the matter?" said Mary, with quick sympathy. "Are you hurt?"

"My wrist is broke, seems like, Miss, an' I can't find a doctor. The 'spenseries is all shut up bein' as it's Christmas, you know. I've been tryin' ever since mornin' to find one."

"Oh!" said Mary, pitifully. And she, too, stood still, casting about how to get help for this immediate need.

"If I could only find the deaconesses, they'd help me, I know. They used to come to see Mis' Jones—she lived in the room next to mine till she died. They was awful good to her, and they was good to me, too. They're good to everybody. Mis' Jones told me they lived down this way."

Mary had never heard of deaconesses before—the people who were "good to everybody"—but she took the poor creature by the arm.

"Come," said she. "We'll find a policeman. He'll tell us what to do."

"Oh, no, Miss, please, thank you. I don't want to

be sent to no hospital. I'll just be goin' along now, thank you."

"Oh, let me go with you," said Mary. "I won't speak to the policeman if you don't want me to, but I want to see you safe with your friends. Do you know the address of the deaconesses?"

No, the old woman did not know.

They walked along and soon came to a drugstore. "Let's go in here," urged Mary. "Maybe they can tell us where the deaconesses live."

Sure enough the clerk readily gave them the address. His directions were quite clear, but Mary insisted upon going with her.

"This is dreffle kind of you," said the poor creature, as they walked along. "But I'm afeared I'm taking you all out o' your way. An' Christmas day, too!"

"Oh, no," said Mary, "I'm glad to help you. But how did it happen?"

"Well, 'twas the very first thing this mornin', dearie. You see, I nurses for a livin'. I ain't a regular trained nurse, you know"—she looked up at Mary with a little smile of apology for even the suggestion—"but I jes' goes 'round among the folks that's poorer 'n I be, an' tries to help 'em a little. You see I can comb their hair, an' tidy up the room a bit, an' make a little toast an' tea for 'em. An' sometimes they pays me a little an' sometimes they don't. But I never stops for that when a poor body's in need and hasn't got nobody else to do for 'em."

She looked up again with a mute, childlike appeal for approval. Mary nodded, smiling.

"An' this mornin', you see, my little room was so cold—I lives in one room, which is a plenty an' doesn't

take much coal to heat—but this mornin' the cold seemed to come through every crack. It's hard to be cold in bed, so I jumps up quick to put a little shovelful of coal on the fire, an' when my bare feet struck the floor I fainted dead away. I don't know how long I laid there, but when I come to, the fire was all out in the stove an' my wrist was broke. I don't know jes' how I managed to get the fire lit an' a little bite of bread and tea. I'm afeared I was a little free with the kindlin' wood"—again the apologetic glance, the dumb appeal for a lenient judgment—"an' then I started out to find a doctor. An' you're the first person that's spoke kind to me, Miss, all day long."

"Have you had any dinner?" said Mary, in a choked voice. It seemed so pitiful—this forlorn, kindly old soul, tramping about in the bitter cold with her broken wrist and nobody "speakin' kind" to her all day long on Christmas Day.

"No, Miss, but I ain't hungry, not the least mite."

The number to which they had been directed was easily found. It was a large brick house. A modest brass plate at the side read "Deaconess Home." The door opened to Mary's ring, and she caught a glimpse of kind faces and black gowns. A breath of warm friendliness came out from the comfortable rooms.

"Why, Auntie King!" exclaimed someone. "What has happened to you?"

The old woman was drawn into the house, and Mary, although also invited to enter, turned away, her errand done. Her sore heart was eased a little.

When she reached the boarding-house the girls were home again, and their blessed chatterings kept her from thinking. They all ate supper, at which, as it

was Christmas, they had canned peaches and cake. The cake had little red sugar plums, very hard, set around at regular intervals in the frosting. Inside, it tasted like dry bread sweetened a little.

But still it was a Christmas supper. Mrs. Turner did the best she could by her boarders.

CHAPTER XIV

LOOKING FOR WORK

Vinnie and many of the other girls went to the store the next Monday after Christmas in harrowing anxiety. The rush was over, and they knew that many of them must be discharged. Mary cared little. It seemed to her, despite Vinnie's anxious tremors, that there could be no trouble about getting other and better situations. She would, indeed, have gone out long before searching for a better place but for Vinnie, whom she would not leave, and who would not listen to any change. As it happened, both girls were retained. Sadie stayed, of course. Lou went, and many of the others whom Mary had learned to know a little. They did not come back to say goodbye; they simply dropped out. It seemed sad to Mary. She never knew how infinitely sad it was to some of them.

Business remained fairly good until a few days after New Year's, when it dropped off surprisingly. There was much leisure at the ribbon counter, and gossip was correspondingly lively. Among other things the affairs of Nellie Mertle were freely discussed. Mary learned that she had been a clerk in the store. She was strikingly beautiful and a general favorite. One unfortunate day she happened to come under the eye of the youngest of the Smith brothers—there were three of them in the firm of Smith and Smiths'. A few days later she left her work at the store, and now the

girls only saw her occasionally on the street. She was dressed always in the height of fashion. Most of the girls were loud in their scorn, but some of the older ones, like Sadie Spencer, were truly sorry for her. Some few others, it was plain to see, actually envied her.

The story added terror to Mary's fears for Vinnie. The store was closed now at six o'clock. The commissions from the girls' sales had greatly decreased, and Vinnie was in a state of chronic bankruptcy.

"You must get some new shoes, Vinnie," said Mary one morning. "Those are positively disreputable."

"How am I to do it?" replied Vinnie, half crying. "I pay two and a half for board, and I make about three and a half. Then my lunches cost sixty cents. How can any girl dress decently on half a dollar a week? I can't, and that's the end of it. And if we don't dress just so, out we go!" She began to cry in earnest.

"It is hard," said Mary, with tears in her eyes.

"How do you ever do it, Mame? Oh, I know. You've got money—lots of it. But maybe you'll know what it is, by and by, and then you'll have more sympathy."

Mary did not reply at once. She was used to Vinnie's ways. She went over to the girl and laid her hand on her shoulder with an affectionate, protecting motion.

"Vinnie," said she, "dear Vinnie, I do wish you'd go home."

"Home! I haven't got any home, I tell you," angrily retorted the girl. "I was turned out of doors by

that woman—plague take her. But I wouldn't go back to that sleepy old town for all the world. I like it here awfully. I've been to the theater once any way since I came to Chicago, and Greendale never has a show of any kind. It's just 'wav out in the country, you see."

"But what are you going to do, Vinnie? Can't you write to your father for some money, till you get a better start?"

"I have written over and over again, but the mean old thing won't send me a cent. He's just glad to get rid of me. I'll write again, though."

"Do," said Mary. "Tell him you simply must have enough money to buy a pair of shoes. He surely won't refuse you that little."

But no money came, and Mary lent the distressed girl the money for the shoes. Her own money was lessening, though not very rapidly, for she counted every penny. She still believed that other work with better wages could be found, and was only delaying her search for it, because, day after day, she dared not leave Vinnie. Her loving warnings were unceasing, and the girl seemed at last to have her eyes at least partly opened to her danger. Moreover, by constant watchfulness, Mary managed so that the floorwalker rarely had a chance to speak to Vinnie alone. It was very plain to be seen, however, that he still admired her.

Matters drifted along in this way until the middle of February, and Mary was desperately feeling that in some way a change must be made, when there came an unexpected blow.

It was nearing the close of a week. All day Friday

Mallory had lingered about the ribbon counter. Mary was in terror, but the long day was over at last. The two girls left the store together, as they usually did. Once on the open walk, Mary began to breathe freely, when the man she feared stepped up behind them and coolly took Vinnie's arm.

"Good evening," said he. "It seems good to get out of the hive, don't it? Let's all go into Kingston's and have a dish of oysters together. Rest us, you see."

"No, thank you, Mr. Mallory," replied Mary quickly. "Our supper is at six fifteen, and we must hasten. Good evening."

They were at a corner and she drew Vinnie away, her strong arm-clasp and her stronger will compelling the girl's acquiescence.

Mallory looked after Mary, literally gnashing his teeth.

"We'll see which comes out on top, blank blank you," said he to himself. "You think you're blanked smart, but—"

The next evening, as Mary drew her pay at the little window, she received the briefest of notices that her services were no longer desired at Smith and Smiths'. She recognized instantly the work of the floor-walker. She glanced apprehensively at Vinnie back of her in the line. She hoped intensely that she too had been discharged, but her worst fears were realized when she saw Vinnie take her pay with no further word.

They walked together down the street. Mallory did not appear.

"Vinnie, I've been discharged," said Mary.

"Discharged! Oh, you're guying me. You sell twice as much as I do."

"All the same I am discharged. The man at the window told me so when he paid me."

"Why, Mary! What can it mean?" cried Vinnie, stopping her walk to look at her.

Mary took her arm in the old calm way and they started on. Vinnie burst out in indignant protest.

"It's just as mean as it can be! I can't believe it, Mame. I never heard of such injustice. There's certainly some mistake. You! One of the best and steadiest. And Mr. Mallory knows you are. Why don't he stop it? He could. I'm just going to tell him Monday morning, that I think it's a burning shame, and ask him—"

"Vinnie, hush! Don't you see, dear, it's Mr. Mallory who did it?"

"Mr. Mallory did it? You must be crazy. What reason could he—"

A flash of sudden comprehension burst upon her.

"Oh!" she gasped. "Do you think he would? How could he?"

"If he would do that other thing—and I know he would—he wouldn't hesitate to remove such a little obstacle as I am—"

"But where's your proof, Mame? Mallory's not a saint, I suppose, any more than the rest of us, but he's been kind to me, and I don't think you ought to say such things about him unless you know—unless you are absolutely sure it's true. How can you prove it?"

"I don't suppose I can prove it, Vinnie, but I know it all the same. Didn't you see how he looked at me last night on the street?"

"Well, I do think you were too hard on him,

Mame," said Vinnie, pouting. "And we lost the oysters, too. You're such an old nun yourself that you think everyone else ought to be. You wouldn't let me speak to a man if you had your way."

Mary was in utter despair. How could the girl be so blind and so shallow! Yet it was such a pity. There were many lovable things about her. She was sweet, affectionate, winsome—just the girl that in a sheltered home would be "a perfect darling." But out here, alone in the pitiless world, longing for companionship, hungry for all the pleasant things that make up the natural life of a girl, having always behind her the bay of the gray wolf, so ignorant, so willful, so pitifully young—what could save her?

As they walked along the idea of telling her friend the story of her own degradation flashed into Mary's mind. Surely that would open her eyes. It would be a self-immolation to Mary, but that weighed little in her mind. She would have gone gladly to a fiery death to save the girl. But it would mean the instant loss of Vinnie's companionship—for, of course, Vinnie wouldn't go with her after she knew—and what would the poor foolish child do with no one to watch over her?

They had reached their room. Mary burst into tears.

"Never mind, Mamie dear," said Vinnie, turned comforter. "Don't cry. You'll get some other place, you old dear. I couldn't, but you will, you're so smart. All the same it's a mean shame, and I'm going to tell them so, the whole lot of them, Mallory and everybody else. I will, I declare I will! I'll speak my mind out if I'm bounced myself the next minute."

"Oh, Vinnie, it isn't that. It's you I'm thinking of.

I can get work, I know I can, but I'm so worried about you."

"Why, what are you worried about me for? What do you want me to do?"

"I wish you'd promise me—promise me solemnly—you'll never speak to that man again."

Vinnie considered, her pretty head tilted coquettishly to one side. How charming she was!

"I can't quite do that, Mame. I'll be the soul of propriety; but if your theory is right, and he got you fired, he'll fire me, too, if I don't look out."

"Let him do it," said Mary, eagerly. "Nothing would please me better. Then you could come with me and we'd get work together. I'll tell you what, Vinnie, just don't go back there at all, and let's try together to get something else."

"Well, but—who'll pay my board next week while we're looking?"

"I will," cried Mary desperately.

"And the next week after? And the next after that? Are you made of money, Mame?"

"Oh, but we should find work, Vinnie—I'm sure we should. Something better than clerking at Smith and Smiths', too."

"But suppose we didn't?"

Mary had not thought of that. *Suppose they didn't?*

"How long did you have to look before you got work, Mame, when you first came to the city?" asked Vinnie.

"Why, no time at all. I saw the notice in the store window and they took me right in."

"Oh, yes, I remember. It was just before Christmas. That makes all the difference in the world. But

I happened to get to Chicago a month or so ahead of you, and I looked and answered 'ads' two solid weeks before I got a place. It wasn't funny, not a little bit. And that's where all my money went to—I had a little at first. Tell you what, Mame, I'll quit fast enough when there's anything to quit to. But you go and try for me—for both of us rather—while I hold down my place at the old stand. But in the meantime I'll be a model of polite dignity to Mallory. I promise you that. You're a good girl, Mame, the best friend I ever had in all the world. I wish I was half as good as you. But my mother died—"

She turned away with a little sob.

"So did mine," said Mary, huskily. The girls kissed each other.

Mary took fresh courage about Vinnie. Surely with her true heart and witty head she would not go far astray. No, it was not best to burden the child with her own terrible story—at least not yet. To get work for them both, away from Smith and Smiths', that was certainly the best plan. Vinnie would have to be at the store, to be sure, while Mary was looking for work, but surely she could be trusted, now that her eyes were at least partly opened.

The Sunday's rest increased Mary's hopefulness. Monday morning she was up bright and early. She bought all the morning papers, cut out the advertisements which looked hopeful—there were many of them—and started out. Aside from the absolute necessity of finding work for herself, she was animated by the inspiring motive of helping Vinnie. It was this care for another in greater immediate need and danger than herself that kept her up these heavy days. The

advertisements, most of them, were for office help—one, to address envelopes. Four were vague, but seemed to Mary most promising of all. One of these suggested "genteel employment" with good pay. Another read, "Intelligent young woman wanted to take charge of important department of business. Make from $20.00 to $50.00 a week"; while another called for ladies to learn a "good business." Instruction was promised free in this last case, with steady employment at the end.

Mary went first of all to the address given in the advertisement promising the "$20.00 to $50.00 a week." It was in a business block in the heart of the city. She was shown into a large, beautifully furnished room, out from which, with low partitions between, opened several small offices. Typewriters were clicking and well dressed men and women were moving to and fro. Noting the signs of ease and luxury everywhere Mary thought back over the weary weeks at Smith and Smiths' and wondered how she could have been so foolish as to stay on—and at such starvation wages! Surely she and Vinnie could do this work, whatever it was, that others were doing so easily.

Five or six young women were already seated in the large room. They seemed to be waiting for something, and Mary guessed that like herself they had answered the advertisement.

Mary was soon taken into one of the private rooms, where she was met by a well-dressed and ladylike woman who greeted her kindly, and seemed in no haste. She did not ask Mary for references, but she inquired about her education—especially if she had

studied physiology—about her experience in the world and many other general matters. Finally she guardedly explained the nature of the business. "Ladies of tact and energy—ladies of culture, like yourself," were wanted to travel throughout the country "lecturing," and finding sub-agents for a disgusting patent medicine. The "$20.00 to $50.00 a week" was to be commission on sales to be made by these hypothetical agents to be secured.

"You will notice, my dear," said the woman, with a benevolently patronizing air, "that you will be doing the world a genuine service. Our remedy is a thoroughly good and valuable one. Our afflicted sisters need it."

Mary left the office in disappointment and disgust. She decided to try next the advertisements for office help. In the first two places at which she called she was met in a strictly business-like way. References were immediately asked for, in response to which she gave the name of Smith and Smiths' as her recent employers. The interviews lasted but a moment, however, for in both cases the wages offered were lower than she had been receiving. At the third place she was shown into a private office, in which a large, handsome man sat in a large leather chair before a desk, smoking a cigar.

"Morning! Take a seat!" said he. Still smoking, he looked Mary carefully over. She flushed scarlet under the scrutiny. It reminded her of the way Ira once looked a horse over, which a man was trying to sell the doctor.

"I called in answer to your advertisement for office help," said Mary.

"Oh, yes. Well, I want a girl." Still he looked at her.

"What is the work?" asked Mary. She lifted her head a little in instinctive reserve, at which high-bred movement the man smiled admiringly.

"Well, it's addressing envelopes and meeting callers and—let's see, you don't write on the typewriter, do you?"

"No, sir."

"Well, you could learn. And—oh, just making yourself generally useful. You'll soon learn the points. Any bright girl like you would pick 'em up quick enough."

Mary's hopes rose.

"What wages do you pay?" she asked with hardly concealed anxiety.

"Oh, six or seven dollars a week if a girl can be accommodating, and more after a while."

"I'm not afraid of work," said Mary. Her eager hope made the words seem very cordial. Should she speak about a place for Vinnie now? She decided to wait a little. There would be more chance of success after a while—after she knew her employer better and had proved that she could make herself valuable. She might spoil everything by being too hasty.

"When shall I begin?" said she.

"Right off," replied the man. "Hang your things up on that hook and come here. I have some letters to file."

Mary did as directed, then came and stood by the desk. Her face was flushed, her eyes were shining with excitement.

"My G—d, but you're a peach!" said the man. He

rose with his left hand full of letters, but instead of giving them to her he slipped his right arm around her waist and tried to kiss her. She drew back, but he persisted.

"Pshaw! Don't be a Nancy," said he.

"Let me go! Let me go, I tell you!" cried Mary, struggling. Then, as he would not, "I'll scream. Let me go!"

"Oh, well, go then. I don't want a prude around me. Just a little harmless fun."

Mary snatched her hat and jacket and rushed out of the room and into the street. She was white now and breathless. Oh, the horror of it! What should she do? How could she try any more? She had never dreamed of meeting such things in an effort to find honest work. And did poor little Vinnie have to go through such experiences? No wonder she dreaded losing her place.

Mary walked and reasoned herself into composure, then compelled herself to go on answering the other advertisements. The "business" to be taught by free instruction, with steady employment afterward, was that of a "lady barber." At another place, where the "genteel work" was promised, a middle-aged woman with dark hollows under her eyes came to the door of a downtown flat in answer to Mary's ring. She wore a pink silk wrapper, much trimmed with lace. Her frowsy hair was a light yellow and looked dead. It had been bleached. The room was richly furnished, but in violent disorder, an unmade folding-bed occupying one corner. Mary stepped inside, and the woman cleared off a chair and asked her to be seated. Then she explained.

The advertisement? Oh, yes. Well, she lived all alone and wanted company—some nice, sociable girl. There really wasn't anything to do—they would take all their meals out—but she wanted someone to help entertain her friends. She would pay well to a girl who would give satisfaction. She had a good many callers—*gentlemen* callers—and—

Mary got out of the place as quickly as she could. Safe on the street once more she resolved to cut out from her list all the vague advertisements. She plodded on through the long afternoon, but with no shadow of success. She dreaded to meet Vinnie with such a story of failure, but there was no help for it. But she would not let her see how discouraged she felt.

"Well, what luck?" queried Vinnie, the moment she entered the room.

"I've had a lot of much needed exercise—walked five miles I do believe—but I haven't found anything yet. It would be surprising if I had—the first day."

Vinnie threw her arms around her with a girlish caress.

"And you've got a lot of experience that you won't own up to, you old dear," said she. "You're made of pure grit, Mame, all the way through. You'd smile if you were burning at the stake. You look tired to death. But let's go down to hash and we can talk afterward."

After supper the tired girls pulled their cots together and lay down on them—there were no easy chairs.

"Well?" began Mary.

"Oh, you needn't say a word," interrupted Vinnie. "I know the story by heart. I was in it two whole weeks, you know Smith and Smiths' is paradise compared with it."

Mary could only feebly insist that it would be unreasonable to expect to find work the first day.

"No, nor the second, nor the third. Tell you what, Mame, if I didn't love you so well I'd advise you to go home, same's you did me. I don't know what you'll do." She looked greatly troubled. "You see, Mame, I've found out how it is. The good respectable firms do want office help once in a while, but they always have a lot of eligibles lined up waiting. They don't have to advertise, except in some emergency. It's the little fake concerns that advertise—think it gives them style to have well-dressed girls around in the office—makes a good impression on customers."

"I wonder if I couldn't get housework to do?" said Mary.

"Oh, my gracious, Mame, don't speak of it! Get you up at half past four to shake down the furnace and shovel in coal, and keep you washing dishes till nine at night! Treat you like a slave—never have any company—eat their old leavin's at the table—sleep in the nastiest little holes!"

"Oh, I wouldn't mind those things," said Mary.

"Maybe you wouldn't, but there are some other things you would mind, and you can just bank on it. Do you imagine those girls get off scot free? The devil's in the kitchen as well as in the shop."

"Maybe he is. But do you know, Vinnie, I think really I wouldn't be afraid of the devil if only I could get something to do. I believe I will try housework. But—"

"Now, look-a-here," interrupted Vinnie, angrily. "If you go to doing anything of that kind you and me part friends, and that's the dead truth. I thought

you wanted me to go with you? I'd *never* do housework. I'd starve first. But you can't anyway. The first thing they ask about is references—the last place you worked at, and why you left—'fraid you'll run away with their dirty old spoons, I s'pose. And to give Smith and Smiths' name won't do you no good, even if you hadn't been fired, 'cause it wasn't housework, you see. And they're dead sure to want to know all about you—where you were born and what you've been doing all your life long."

Vinnie was massing her arguments well. She had not failed to notice Mary's reticence about her past life. Mary was silent, seeing at once that her lack of references would be a hopeless obstacle.

"Tell you what, Mame," resumed Vinnie, mournfulness taking the place of her anger, "you'll just have to go home, I'm afraid."

"Tell me about the girls," said Mary. She didn't want Vinnie to be talking about home.

"Well, they're all awfully sorry. They say it's a mean shame. Sadie agrees with you that Mallory done it, but the rest of 'em don't know whether to blame it on him or not. Sadie sent you her love very particular, and said if ever you needed a friend to come to her mother's house, somewhere on Sixteenth Street. She says there are eight of 'em and a roomer in a five-room flat, or she'd make you come and stay with her till you found work. She's a brick, Sade is—a regular old gold brick. The genuine kind if ever there was one."

"Tell her I thank her very much," said Mary, with a trembling voice. "And give her my love, too."

"And Mallory—I just gave him the marble shoulder

—'t any rate all I dared. Haven't spoken five words to him all day long. But I don't believe it can be true, Mame. I heard him asking Sadie where you were, and you should have seen her freeze him!" She laughed at the remembrance. "But he looked real sorry."

"Well, you freeze him, too, dear, and I'll go on looking for something. We'll find a place yet. Did you try any of those employment agencies, Vinnie?"

"All of 'em," replied Vinnie promptly. "That is, I went into all of 'em. But good gracious, they're 'most all run by women, and they're worse'n men any day. Some of 'em are decent enough, but you have to pay a dollar to belong, before they'll do a thing for you. But some others! Why, one old vixen actually asked me to take off my cloak to see if I had a good figure."

"What did you do?" asked Mary, breathless.

"Well, fortunately I hadn't handed in my dollar yet, so I just asked her, as sober as a judge, what the regulation waist size was for 'tending office."

Vinnie laughed heartily, and Mary laughed, too.

"Well, what then?"

"Then? Oh, I had to flee for my life. Let's see! Where was that place? Somewhere on Clark Street, I believe. Look out for it—old woman with a wig and black eyes. She's a terror! Did anybody try to kiss you, Mame?"

"Yes, one man," confessed Mary with face aflame again at the remembrance. "Did they you, too?"

"Oh, yes—lots of 'em. I got so I knew the signs after a while. I'm not such a little softie as you think, Mamie. I reckon I can hold my own with Mallory or anybody else. I've done it so far, anyway."

"But what in the world did you go out with him for —that night just before Christmas—you remember? I was so frightened about you. And why will you still let him give you flowers?"

"Just because I want them, Mamie," replied Vinnie in a pretty little whine. "No other reason in the wide world. I'm just hungry and thirsty for them. And I really and truly can't see any harm in it. I don't believe he's a bad man, Mame. He says he's really sorry for us girls."

"Why doesn't he give flowers to us all then—and invite somebody else besides you to go out to lunch?"

"Oh, I've got you now. He did. He invited you that night, don't you remember?"

"But it was just because I stuck so close to you. He knew he couldn't get you without me."

"I don't see what right you have to say that. You're just prejudiced against the man, Mame."

Mary saw it was of no use to argue.

"Well, I trust you, Vinnie," said she. "I'm just as certain as ever that he's a scoundrel, but I guess my little Badger State girl will keep her eyes open."

"Indeed I will, you dear old fraud!" and Vinnie lunged over on Mary's bed to kiss her. "You're the one comfort of my life, Mame. I don't know what I'd do without you."

And Mary herself was comforted. Because one creature in the whole world cared for her, and because that creature needed her help Mary gathered hope again, and strength for the next day's quest. Other girls found work, and at living wages.

But the next day was like the first, and the third was the same.

A week passed and Mary was still at her task. She would not give it up. Indeed she could not. Her hope of helping Vinnie had grown faint and her own need loomed up threateningly. Her money had dwindled to less than twenty dollars. When that was gone — what? Mary's brave heart quailed as the thought would intrude itself. She went on doggedly, desperately. She paid her entrance fee at two employment bureaus, carefully choosing those that seemed to her the best. She found the Young Woman's Christian Association, and two or three women there were trying to find something for her. One day one of them told her of a possible place as night telephone operator in a suburb, and arranged that she was to go to apply for it at seven o'clock the next evening.

Vinnie came home in high spirits the day Mary learned of this place in the suburbs. She seized Mary by the waist and waltzed her gaily about, kissing her on the forehead, cheek, nose—any place she could hit her.

"Oh, Mame, you old nun! You're bluer than indigo. Laugh a little, can't you? It's a long lane that has no turning. Your luck'll change pretty soon, see if it don't. Let's laugh and be happy."

"Why, what's got into you, dear? Have you had a windfall—wages raised?" said Mary, as soon as she could catch her breath.

"Oh, no, but—oh, I just feel good! Something nice is going to happen or my bones tell lies, as old Granny Applejay used to say about her rheumatiz."

Mary disentangled herself from the caressing arms, and they went down to supper. Vinnie was bubbling over with happiness. Mary had never seen her so gay.

She laughed at the slightest excuse, and, indeed, with no excuse at all. She chattered like a magpie, and every little while she threw out vague but delightful suggestions of good times coming. Her spirit was contagious, and Mary went to bed with a lighter heart than for many days. "The darkest night is just before dawn," thought she.

"Mame!" called Vinnie the next morning, looking back from the door as she was starting to work. "Be home early to-night. Maybe I'll have something to tell you. Oh, I forgot about that old telephone place. You won't get it though. Union Depot is it, that you leave at? Are you sure you're not afraid to go out there after six o'clock? Say, Mame, darling, if they should want you back at Smith and Smiths' very bad —just get down on their knees to you, all three of the Smiths—the big bear, the middle-sized bear and the little bear—all down on their knees to you together, would you come?"

"What do you mean?" said Mary.

But Vinnie only called back a merry "Ta, ta! Tell you all in a day or two," and ran on.

Mary was much bewildered. What did the little fly-away have in mind? Mary wondered with herself if she wanted to go back to Smith and Smiths', even if she could. She was not at all sure that she did. Yet would it not be better than this? Scores of good girls worked there year after year—like Sadie and her sister —in spite of the disagreeable things. Girls far better than she was—ah, she!

She listlessly put on her wraps and went out. She called at the employment bureaus and at the Young Women's Christian Association, but there was nothing

new. She sought the street again and walked on irresolutely. Her mind was full of Vinnie and her mysterious hints. She paused at a corner. Should she try further to-day? An old woman at a little wooden stand full of newspapers accosted her.

"Buy a paper, Miss? Buy a paper? Tribune? Times?"

Mary bought a paper, and pausing near the stand, turned to the advertising columns. There was nothing in them that seemed worth while to try for. She bought another paper—the cost was a trifle—but with similar disappointing results. She had no heart to try for places that a week before would have seemed easy to obtain. She folded the papers carefully and gave them back to the old woman.

"I don't want them any more," said she, "and maybe you can sell them again."

"Thank you, Miss," replied the woman. Mary noticed her manner—that of a lady. Her face beamed out alert and kindly from the folds of a black knit woolen shawl wound round her head and neck. She wore a decent old cloak reaching below her knees, and a shawl above it, over her shoulders. A pair of immense felt overshoes looked boldly out from beneath her plain woolen skirts.

"Thank you," she repeated, as Mary lingered irresolutely. "You didn't find anything to try for? I saw you looking at the want 'ads.' "

"No," said Mary, wearily.

"It's sad work, Miss, this trying to find work. I've sold papers to many a girl like yourself, and I've often wondered what became of the poor things. I'm glad I'm old sometimes."

Mary looked at her and envied her gray hairs. The struggle would soon be over for her.

"How long have you sold papers?" she asked.

The morning rush was over, and between her few sales the woman seemed inclined to be sociable.

"Six years, Miss—six years and more. I was sewing before—finishing vests at Goldman's at a cent apiece, and me furnishing my own thread. I was all alone—my husband's gone, and my children, too—and the city's a hard place for a friendless old woman all alone. But many a time I've thought it was a harder place for a young woman all alone," with a keen glance at her listener, "and the pay was simply starvation, with a dollar and a half for room rent and furnish your own thread. And I was getting all worn out with sitting up till midnight to do enough to live at all. And one day as I was standing right here on this very corner, Miss, waiting for a street car to take back some work, I heard a newsboy—a little fellow he was, too—telling his chum that he'd made twenty-two dollars that month selling papers. I didn't believe it at first—thought he was bragging, as boys will. But they talked on and I saw it was true. And the thought flashed over me why couldn't I do that, too, as well as a little boy? It wouldn't be half so hard as sewing my eyes out by a kerosene lamp on those dark-colored vests, and my eyes were failing fast, and nothing before me but starvation or Dunning. So I didn't take any more vests that day, but bought some papers instead and started trying to sell them right here on this very corner. The boys—you should have seen the boys." A tender smile broke over the weather-beaten old face. "If I'd been another boy crowding in on this

corner they'd have fought me tooth and nail. But an old woman! And I suppose I was pretty white and thin with getting no exercise for so long and the food mostly bread and tea. The boys—bless their hearts—they just set me up in business, so to speak. They told me what papers to buy, and when, and how many. And even to this day they keep an eye on me, and when I happen to get overstocked—for I can't run round, you know, the way they do—they come up and pretend they've had a great run on that particular paper, and can I possibly let them have a few? But, bless their little hearts, I see through them." The old voice grew husky. "The poor are very kind to the poor, Miss."

Mary was seized with a new idea.

"Oh, let me tell you," she said, "I have—may I ask you—don't you think I could sell papers, too?"

A smile of pitying dissent came over the old woman's face and her head began to shake a negative. But Mary continued, hastily.

"You see, madam, I'm all alone in the world, too, and I—my money is almost all gone, and I can't find anything to do—not a thing. And I've tried everything, and I don't know what I'm going to do. I must do something."

The woman looked into Mary's eyes and the smile faded from her face. But still she shook her head.

"No, Miss, no. You can't do it. You see you're young and handsome, that's the trouble, and the men—. Nobody bothers a poor old creature like me, but—"

She said no more, but Mary understood. She dropped her head and walked rapidly away.

Old and friendless and penniless! Young and friendless and penniless! And the last was worse than the first.

Mary spent the day tracing down every place that had the least shadow of promise—dishwashing in a restaurant, paper folding in a printing-office, carpet sewing in a great dry goods house, an opportunity to "learn massage in ten lessons"—but in each case there was some insurmountable obstacle. She visited several factories which were advertising for girls. Some of these places were really respectable factories—large buildings with whirring machinery and hundreds of hands. Others, Mary was astonished to find, were private houses, dark and dirty, and crowded full of men and women who sat at small sewing machines or stood by tables, pressing seams or cutting out garments. The air in these places was intolerably bad. Men were smoking and spitting tobacco juice on the floor, the odor from the unsanitary toilet rooms was sickening, and more than once Mary noticed hectic-cheeked, emaciated women coughing and expectorating freely on the already filthy and littered floor as they sewed on with feverish haste. Many little children were working here, sewing, folding, pasting, ironing. Mary found no opening for herself. Some of the work was hopelessly beyond her ability; other parts were paid for so poorly that no girl who did not board at home could possibly live by them. But all the day Vinnie's happy hints lay in Mary's mind. She would have to go back to Smith and Smiths', she supposed, but—well, she would try for that telephone work; surely there might be hope for that. Few girls would care to work at night.

Her directions were explicit, and she found her way without difficulty to the office of the company in Fairmont. There was but one man in the office. He was sitting at a desk, with an assortment of toothpicks laid out before him. He was evidently just from dinner, and picked his teeth in a very absorbed way while Mary stated her business.

"Sorry, Miss," he said at last, carefully balancing a toothpick much the worse for wear over the large waste-paper basket at his side and waiting to see it fall in. "Sorry, but we have"— choosing a new toothpick—"we have just"—performing a difficult surgical operation on his second molar—"the assistant treasurer's cousin applied for the place just after we put in the notice, and we"—staunching a tiny flow of blood from a resentful mucous membrane with a somewhat dingy handkerchief packed into the widely opened cavity—"we gave it to her."

There was nothing more to say, and he proceeded with his scarcely interrupted dental operations, not looking up or responding in any way to Mary's civil good-night.

It was nearly eight o'clock before Mary reached Mrs. Turner's. She determined to make Vinnie tell her if there was any chance at Smith and Smiths'. Perhaps it was best to go back for the present. Money? Well, she would be more economical—do her laundrying in the basin as the others did. At any rate she would be near Vinnie—the only friend she had in the world—Vinnie and Sadie. How good it was of Sadie to send her that loving message! Would she have done it if she had known?

But Vinnie was not in the house. Where could she

be? Oh! Gone to meet her probably—the foolish child—and had missed her, some way. She remembered that Vinnie had inquired about the depot—on purpose, no doubt, to meet her. But was Vinnie home for supper? The other girls had not noticed, and with a chill of fear at her heart Mary hastily went to the dining-room. No, Miss Marsh had not been home to tea; the serving girls were sure of it. What could it mean? Was it possible that—but, no, Vinnie had hardly spoken of Mallory lately. And yet—

Mary forced herself to eat the food one of the kind-hearted waiters insisted on bringing her. Then she went back to the bedroom. No Vinnie! She wrote a hasty noet, leaving it with the door girl in case Vinnie should come in, and retraced her steps to the station, hoping to find her there. But she was disappointed. She hurried back—Vinnie had probably passed her on the way. But she had not been home.

Mary could do nothing more. She counted the long hours till eleven—twelve. Surely Vinnie would come then—after the theater and the little supper—as she had done before. Then she counted the minutes, till one o'clock — two — three — with an agony like that of a mother for her first-born. But Vinnie did not come.

It was a rigid rule at Smith and Smiths', as Mary well knew, that there should be no visiting with friends over the counter. But Mary hoped by going early to get a few words with Sadie before Mr. Mallory came. At eight exactly she was at the ribbon counter.

"Why, Mary!" said Sadie, cordially. "I'm glad to see you. But what's the matter? You look like a ghost."

"Do you know where Vinnie is?" said Mary in a whisper. "She didn't come home last night."

"Didn't go home!" Sadie's face clouded heavily. "Didn't go home? Why!"— She started!—"My sister —linings counter—ask for a note in half an hour," whispered she, hastily seizing a roll of cherry colored ribbon, the first at hand, and spinning it out in graceful loops before Mary's bewildered eyes.

"How many yards did you say?"said she, with an air of strict professionality. "You couldn't find a more becoming color."

The floor-walker was upon them.

"Visiting in hours is not permitted, Miss Spencer," said he severely.

"Is selling ribbons in hours permitted, Mr. Mallory?" retorted Sadie, her defiant gray eyes meeting his frown unflinchingly.

Mary bought a yard of ribbon, haggling long over it in the hope that she might get another word with Sadie, or that possibly Vinnie herself might come. But all in vain. Mallory maintained his position and Vinnie did not appear. Mary waited for her package. It seemed to her for a moment that she must scream out—must fly at the man standing so insolently near her. A wave of the animal fury that a mother tigress feels when her young are attacked came upon her—a fierce desire to do him physical violence. She had not slept, and her nerves were weakened by long eating of insufficient food and living the unsanitary life of the city poor. Another step—and but a short one—toward insanity, and she could have torn the man's devilish eyes out of their sockets, thrust a dagger to his sulphurous heart, and shrieked in maniacal delight at the

deed! She turned toward him. Her face was deathly pale and the great eyes, terribly black, and with the pupils reflecting red in the light, blazed upon him like two flames of fire. He had been looking at her with a smile of insolent triumph, but he quailed and shifted back a step or two with a muttered oath.

"Here's your package, Miss South," said Sadie, hastily, dreading something terrible. "I'm sure you'll like the color. Goodbye."

Mary took the package mechanically and walked giddily from the building. She paced the streets till a half hour had passed. Then she entered the store again by a door far from the ribbon counter, found Sadie's sister, Evalyn, who had been in the employ of Smith and Smiths' nearly as long as Sadie herself, and received the promised note. A measure of reason had come to her, and she carried the little paper to her room before she dared to unfold it. *Their* room! There she read the note, looking at it, and catching her breath as if it were Vinnie's dead face. It was hastily written in pencil on a piece of the paper in which ribbon had been rolled up.

DEAR MARY:—You will have to give her up. She's gone and that is sure. I hope you will not feel very bad. I feel very bad, and I done all I could to stop it, but it want no use. I thought it was stopped after you was turned off for she was mad at him, but he made her believe he did not know a thing about it and then yesterday she told me he was going to get you a better place and I told her to look out for him, but she seemed so happy and she loved you very much but she is gone now. Minnie Jorston seen her and him walking together last night just after hours and I am sure poor Vinnie meant no harm, but just to go out with him because you want going to be home last evening. She had told me that you was to be gone awhile. But those old devils

know how to do it with drugged wine and such things and he has done it, and may the curse of God rest upon him is my prayer. And I cant write any more now for he's like a hawk on me. And if ever you or her needs a friend come to my home after half past six.

Yours with love,

SARAH A. SPENCER.

37 16th St.

CHAPTER XV

ON THE TRAIL

"Whoa, Fan! Whoa'p, I say!"

It was a Saturday evening of the November in which had occurred Mary's sudden flight from Boston. In Westland, a cold night had dropped down after a cold day. Ira had "hitched up" and gone to town to get the mail and do some errands for the "wimmen folks." He was returning now, coming down Main Street from the new postoffice, just past Mary's old home, and drew the bay mare up for caution, as he heard the whistle of the express train approaching. The train dragged slowly into view directly before him.

"I'll be danged if she ain't a-stoppin'!" said Ira to himself. "Er, no—she's jest slowin' up for the 'commodation."

Old Fan stopped a few feet from the train. She had long ago ceased to fear anything on the face of the earth, and looked upon snorting engines and thundering trains with absolute nonchalance. Ira sat looking carelessly at the coaches as one after another they slowly crept past. They were brilliantly illuminated within—the passengers plainly visible—and the light from an electric street lamp at the crossing fell upon them from without. Suddenly the man's gaze was riveted on a white face pressed close against one of the windows. He stared at it, fascinated, till he could see it no longer, then stared after the train. It disappeared around a curve with accelerating speed, but still

he sat gazing stupidly. The well-disciplined old horse stood waiting the expected word of command, but it did not come. She finally decided that in emergencies a horse's wit might be needed to supplement a man's, and took a slow, tentative step forward, toward her supper. Then another and another, till her usual homeward gait was attained.

"It's her as sure's breathin'!" said Ira aloud. He drew his shaggy brows down in troubled thought as the horse jogged placidly on.

"Guess I was mistaken—*must* 'a ben— But I vum I couldn't 'a ben. It *was* Mary North," said he again.

A quarter of a mile's further consideration brought in, and out, a still more disquieting idea.

"Er her ghost!"

Ira didn't believe in ghosts in general—indeed he would have declared solemnly that he didn't believe in them at all. But there are very few men in rural New England who have not some pet superstition. Ira believed in "warnin's." Hadn't his own mother broken a looking-glass just one month to a day before his father was killed? And hadn't he himself heard a death watch in the wall ticking off the midnight hours just before his mother died?

To be sure he'd heard death watches a great many other times when nobody had died, but that didn't prevent the warning working once. He remembered now that he had in his pocket a letter for the doctor, addressed in Mary's well-known handwriting, but that signified little. "Run over by them street cars like's not," he muttered. "Or mebbe hed heart trouble like her mother." At any rate she was dead. Of that he was sure.

He hurried the old horse home as fast as she would go, yet he was as long as possible in taking off the harness and shuffling into the kitchen. He handed the soda and other packages to Melissa without a word, and finally the letter. His hand shook.

"Land o' love! What's the matter?" cried Melissa, at sight of his face.

"Sh!" said he, going into contortions of warning gestures. "Give 'em the letter—it's the best way. Give 'em the letter, I say, then I'll tell ye."

Melissa took the letter to the doctor, who was peacefully lying on the lounge in the sitting-room. He had not been able to be out that day. Then she came back. Ira was standing just where she had left him.

"For mercy's sake! What is it?" said she.

"I've had a warnin', Lissie, 'baout Mary." And Ira told his story in a terrified half whisper.

Melissa, though greatly perturbed within, met the crisis with an undaunted front.

"Good gracious, Irey Craddock! A body'd s'pose you was an old woman to see you a-standin' there scairt to death over what I hain't a mossel o' doubt is easy to explain if we jest had the explainin' of it. If 'twas Mary you see, then she can't be dead. Most likely 'twan't her at all! Talk about woman's hysterics! It takes a man to see things."

"It was Mary North!" declared Ira, stung to unwonted insistence. "I'm certain sure. She had on her little brown hat—that new one that the doctor got for her jes' before she went to Boston. I hadn't thought of that till this minute."

"Well, if she wore a hat, she wan't a ghost, was

she?" snapped Melissa. "Ghosts'd look pretty wearin' hats. But mebbe she was comin' home—goin' to surprise us—and was lookin' out, scairt becuse she was bein' carried past. Mebbe she'd—"

But her surmises were cut short by the sudden opening of the sitting-room door. The doctor stood there. Mary's letter, the one written during her last visit to her rooms, was in his hand. It was, of course, the only one which reached him, of the three that Mary had written. His old form trembled greatly. Over his shoulder appeared the dazed face of his wife.

"Ira," said he, "was this the only letter you got?"

"Yes, sir."

They all heard the clock in the sitting-room ticking off the seconds.

"It's from Mary," said the doctor, "and she,"—he cleared his throat—"I don't understand it."

He went back to a chair, for he could hardly stand. Mrs. Sheldon sat down beside him, with many groans. Ira and Melissa came and stood near. They all looked over his shoulder, or tried to do so, as he slowly read the letter aloud. Then in pain and perplexity they tried to decide what it meant.

"Who is 'Jules'?" asked Melissa.

But no one knew.

"She says she's going to Paris," said Mrs. Sheldon.

"Yes, and she must have married him," said the doctor. "I'm afraid—" He stopped, huskily.

"If we only had the other letter," said Melissa. "It'll come Monday." She looked warningly at Ira, but he could not be restrained.

"She ain't gone to no Paris," he blurted out. "I saw her to-night."

"Saw her! Where?" cried the doctor and his wife together.

"On the seven o'clock express—at a window. It slowed up fer the 'commodation, the way it does sometimes, an' I wus waitin' for it to git by, an' I saw her lookin' out o' the window right at the crossin' by her mother's place—er her ghost! I saw it jest as plain as I see you!"

"She was comin' home—she must a' ben," said Melissa, with assurance, "an' jest got carried by. She'll get off the first stop an' come back on the next train. Irey'd better go right back to the depot to meet her. It's all right—she'll explain everything when she comes."

Melissa's sensible proposal carried with it the great relief of something to be done, and swept all before it. Nobody knew when the train from the west was due, but Ira ate a hasty supper and hitched up old Fan again, Melissa nervously helping him. Just before he started the doctor called him into the sitting-room.

"I'm afraid—I'm afraid there's something wrong," said he, trying to speak calmly. "Telegraph to Mary—she says she's at the Merodack Hotel, Boston. And telegraph to Mrs. Clark, too. Here's the address. Send the telegrams the first thing. You'll know what to say—ask her where she is, and if—if she's well. Then if she doesn't come on the train, come home and we'll see—"

"All right, sir."

The doctor put out his hand and Ira shook it. Then the man drove silently away. He followed out his instructions to the letter, but when at twelve o'clock the train from the west stopped at Westland, he was not

surprised that it brought no Mary. He believed in his "warnin'."

At home the doctor was lying on the lounge with his hand over his eyes. Mrs. Sheldon was trying to read her Bible, but her face wore a vacant look. Melissa was knitting furiously on a woolen sock for Ira. A hundred times she had gone to the window to look for Ira, the click of her needles never ceasing.

"There he comes!" said she at last. The doctor and his wife both started up to look. They strained their eyes toward the dim form. He was alone.

Ira brought an answering telegram from Mrs. Clark: "Mary North has not been here since yesterday." There was no answer to the message sent to Mary.

The doctor took a dose of bromide and compelled himself and the rest of the family to go to bed. The next day at noon the old man and Ira took the train for Boston. They went first to Mary's rooms. Mrs. Clark with a frightened face gave the fullest account of Mary's visit on Friday, and testified that she had heard the piano that afternoon. She could tell little more. Yes, Mary had callers occasionally—not often as she knew of. Yes, a young man had called once or twice. She could not remember much about him. He was dark, she believed, and wore a moustache. No, the rent was not paid in advance. Mary was very quiet always—a good roomer. The rooms were in perfect order as the doctor and Ira walked through them. The Thanksgiving box was open but not much of the food gone. None of Mary's personal belongings were missing that the doctor or Ira could notice, save her hat and jacket. The doctor opened the little closet where hung her gowns—a dark blue waist near-

est the door. The sleeve swung out toward him, with a little curve at the elbow, where the round arm had moulded it into shape. He closed the door hastily.

They went next to the Merodack Hotel. The doctor noted with sinking heart the signs of the locality, obvious enough to any but the most innocent. The hotel register showed no "Mary North" as having been a guest—no Mary at all, indeed. They looked for "Jules," but of that name also they could get no trace. There were many J's, but how could they guess that the "J. H. Lasseen," of November 26th, on which their eyes rested repeatedly, was the "Jules" of Mary's letter? Sloan had trusted the hotel clerk to register that night, with a whispered word that out of various possibilities it was to be "Le Cygne," and "Lasseen" was as near as the man could come to it.

The doctor tried describing Mary, hoping against hope that the clerk might remember her. The letter so plainly said, "We are at the Merodack."

The young man at the counter seemed interested.

"Little above size, you say? And with blue eyes?"

"Yes," said the doctor with trembling eagerness, "dark blue. A very pretty girl with brown hair that curls a little on her forehead."

An older man had come up beside the young clerk, stepping covertly on his toes.

"Yes," put in the newcomer, sympathetically. "We had just such a girl here. Wore a red flannel waist and was quite cross-eyed."

The doctor's hopes fell. Everybody seemed most kind and willing to help him, but he could not get the slightest real information. He walked slowly away leaning heavily on Ira's arm.

The older man at the counter turned on the younger and swore at him murderously.

"You know altogether too blanked much for your health," said he. "If you're going to turn detective for every blank blanked old idiot that comes along, you can just git out of here, and be blank blanked to you!"

"I didn't know it was any harm," replied the younger. "It was Sloan's girl, wan't it?—the one that yelped?"

"It wan't anybody, I tell you. She wan't here at all. Nobody is ever here, and nobody has ever ben here that folks is 'round inquirin' for. Understand?"

The doctor went hopelessly to the nearest decent hotel. He thought of the police, and he thought of his old friend in the city, but remembering Mary's letter he could not bring himself to risk seeking help from either. Ira might have been mistaken, and if Mary had indeed voluntarily gone to Paris, no matter under what circumstances, he did not want her affairs to become a matter of newspaper gossip. In the morning he sent Ira to pay Mrs. Clark a month's rent for the rooms, with the message that he wanted them to be ready for Mary any time she might return. Then he went home on the next train and took to his bed. It was the heaviest sorrow of a long life.

Ira haunted the Westland postoffice, though, remembering his "warnin'," he had not the slightest hope of a letter. But Wednesday morning Mary's letter postmarked Chicago was received, and they gathered, hardly breathing, to learn its contents. The doctor struggled through it with drawn face and breaking voice, till the pathetic ending. Then he felt the

clinging arms of the sweet girl about his neck as she kissed him goodbye at the old South Station less than two months before; and he understood the crushed heart that dared not write "your Mary." "The lost Mary!" "The lost Mary!"—The old man's self-control gave way at last, and his sobs shook the bed. Mrs. Sheldon, too, was crying aloud. Ira stood with teeth clenched, fighting for self-control. It was an awful moment.

Suddenly Melissa spoke. Her voice was high and harsh, so changed she herself hardly knew it for her own.

"Send for Stephen!" she cried. "He'll find her—*he loved her!*"

It was four o'clock the same afternoon and most of the students had left their desks in the great laboratory in the German city. Microscopes were carefully encased and delicate scales were locked up for the night in their coverings of glass. A single speck of dust might work untold harm to the intricate mechanism, or vitiate the results of weeks of laborious research.

Stephen was just leaving the room, weary with a heavy day's work, when a uniformed man thrust a cable message into his hand. The first word, "Mary," set his heart a-bounding—the next two nearly stopped its beating.

"Mary is lost. Come. Joshua Sheldon."

Stephen's hand went up over his heart where the sweet face was, in his locket. He crushed the case in, till it hurt his flesh. He looked at his watch and started on a run for the nearest hotel office. He must know the time of trains and the movements

of the ocean steamers. The bank was closed for the day, but he could arrange with Cook's. Telegraphing and telephoning his arrangements, he left the city in an hour, and the next morning saw him standing on the deck of the good ship *Berberic*, steaming away from Bremen.

Stephen had cabled a quick answer to the doctor: "Cable explanation, care *Berberic*, Bremen. I sail Friday." But there had been a delay and the longed-for message did not come in time. There was nothing to do but wait—six long days—yes, seven—of horrible suspense. And all the seven endless days the ominous words never left him. Waking, sleeping, thinking, talking, or walking the deck, it was always "Mary is lost—Mary is lost." His heart beat it out in the long watches of the night: "Mary is—lost. Mary is—lost." The waves washed the words against the steel sides of the ship in soft lappings or angry blows. The steady beat of the engine never ceased to throb them out. The creaking timbers wailed them in the night: "Mary is lost—lost!"

Lost! What could it mean? A hundred interpretations of the frightful word suggested themselves to Stephen. Kidnaped? Missing? The sweet child whose innocent eyes looked up at him from his picture? But mostly he feared the worst. Poor Mary! Poor little unprotected girl! His sweet Wood-violet!

But she should be found. He sent the answer insistent, back to the waves and the engine and the groaning timbers. He would find her! And he would redeem her if money and patience and love—yes, if life itself could do it! He blamed himself bitterly for going away and leaving her with the old couple,

so inexperienced in the dangers of a modern city. Why had he not spoken at all risk? Why had they not consulted him before ever allowing her to live in Boston in that unprotected way? Had they all been crazy? The gray hairs appeared on the young man's temples before that interminable voyage was over and he reached the doctor's house, in early December.

They told him the heart-breaking story and spread out before him all the letters Mary had written. Ira had studied patiently over the hotel registers in Westland—they were not many—and had found in one the name, "J. H. Le Cygne," with the date of Mary's last Saturday at home. Then they had reasoned it out that since one of Mary's letters had mentioned a "Mr. Le Cygne" as calling at her rooms, this man must be the "Jules" of the later letter. Both the doctor and Ira called it "Lee Signee," or they might have connected it with the "Lasseen" of the Merodack's register, as a detective readily did, later. Stephen went to the recorder's office in the neighboring county seat, and found that Mary's property had been transferred to one William Sloan, and that this Sloan had placed a mortgage of five hundred dollars upon it. The transfer and mortgage bore the same date—November 28th. Armed with these facts, Stephen returned to the doctor, gave what poor comfort he could, took all the letters and went to Boston. There he laid the case before the best detective agency in the city.

"I want you to find her and I want you to find him," said he to the chief. "Put your best men on the case and use all possible dispatch. Every day counts with me."

"They are together, I suppose?"

"No," thundered Stephen. Then bethinking himself, he was obliged to make the bitter admission, "However, on second thought, they may be."

"I beg your pardon. I have not studied the case, you know."

Stephen went next to the office of a noted criminal lawyer, and was closeted with him for half an hour. Then he called again at the agency office, arranged for active coöperation from the Chicago Branch of the firm, and himself took the night train for that city. Wherever the man might be, Mary's last letter was sent from Chicago, and it seemed probable to him that she was in that city.

For a week he searched, superficially and, of course, unsatisfactorily. Then he settled down to his work. He rented a house on Harrison Street, and established a free dispensary opening on the street in front. It was not hard to find three or four young physicians glad to coöperate with him, not only for the sake of the eagerly sought-for professional experience that it gave them but also because they were genuinely interested in the social conditions of the locality. As Stephen felt that he could trust them, he confided to them his story. "An eighteen-year-old girl, a ward of my uncle's," was the way he put it; and then would follow the description, toned carefully down to commonplaces of name, size, color of hair and eyes.

The dispensary and its earnest workers soon became widely known in the neighborhood—a beacon light, a haven of help and hope for many a storm-tossed waif—but no Mary drifted to its friendly shelter. Stephen gradually turned it over almost entirely to his assistants,

though he and his man still slept in the rooms above, and began to visit systematically every place at which a clue might possibly be obtained. He soon became a well-known figure at every downtown church and charity station in the city. The mission workers and district nurses of that Protestant Sisterhood of mercy and help known as the Deaconess Order, registered the case on their books, and gave him sympathetic promise of all assistance possible. Roman Catholic institutions, too, were visited; and the Salvation Army people came to know the somber-faced, foreign-looking man with the gray beginning to streak his dark hair. The detectives were goaded on with such inducements as a man desperately in earnest can bring to bear—Stephen had never before been truly grateful that he had money. But all seemed in vain. It is not easy to find one little girl among nearly two millions of swarming people.

Then Stephen gradually took to walking the streets in the evening. Slowly, slowly, up and down brilliantly-lighted State and Dearborn and Clark, and along the shadowy side streets. Many times he passed the house in which lay Mary, sometimes sleeping, sometimes weeping. His dark eyes behind his glasses were always looking at faces, faces—the myriad faces in the endless stream of humanity that all day long and far into the night flowed along the city's highways.

"Some crank or other," said the policemen, tolerantly. "Huntin' for somebody prob'bly—they all get the same look. They don't all keep at it as long as he has, though."

Along in March the first break came—a telegram

from Boston. "We have your man shadowed," it ran. "Telegraph your train."

Stephen boarded the next train east. He swung himself off at the South Station the next evening, his heart trip-hammering. At last he was to hear—if not from Mary, at least about her. The chief of the agency himself was waiting for him.

"Forbes did it," said he. "A new man—very bright. He got a place as bell-boy at the Merodack, and after a while got a clue. Then we used some money with one of the clerks—rather a young fellow. He has evidently told all he knows. And we have the cabman, too. He drove the couple to a certain address in Hancock Street, and a little later to the Merodack. That was three days before the girl finally disappeared. He's certain of the date, November 26th—it seems he had a girl baby born that morning. He was impressed by the look of your girl. She was probably drugged or hypnotized—more of that going on than you'd believe. It seems the man is wanted on the Fairchild case, too—an accessory. Oh, the haul is a good deal richer than we thought—the police have been after him for six weeks. It's ten years in the penitentiary sure, and it may be a good deal worse. He's sharp, and well-disguised, but Forbes ferreted him out."

"What have you learned about my uncle's ward?"

"Not much. This clerk that Forbes has been working, was on duty when the girl ran out of the house, three days afterward — you were right, they are not together. He says the boys helped Sloan up to the room the night before, pretty drunk, and the girl called him her husband. But some time the next day

she came flying down the stairs with an awful scream, and that's the last any of them saw of her."

Stephen groaned aloud.

"The man's bad all 'round. Used to gamble back and forth on the ocean liners from New York to Havre, and there ain't much deviltry he don't know. He's served one term in the Pen. But your little account is pretty weak in the eyes of the law, I'm afraid."

"I want to see him," said Stephen grimly.

"Forbes is next to him all right. But we ought to clap the bracelets on him the first minute."

"Give me a chance first—half an hour."

"Well—but the minute you get through with him we'll be ready."

"When can I see him?"

"He rooms at the Ballard House—that is, sleeps there—sometimes. Heaven only knows where he is between times—Heaven and Forbes. The only way to catch him is to wait 'round the hotel. His kind work at night, you know, and he may not be in till morning."

"But how shall I know him?"

"Oh, I'll stay by you. I've a double interest in the matter now. I don't know him either, but I know Forbes. And besides you might find it convenient to have one of us 'round. Have you got a gun?"

"No, but I don't want any."

"But this kind is treacherous. At any rate keep your eyes open." He looked Stephen over in a dissatisfied way. His face cleared a little, however, as he noticed the size and symmetry of his form. He would have been still more at ease if he had known the training in athletics under expert masters that had been Stephen's daily drill for years.

They waited about the hotel till after midnight. Suddenly a slight look of intelligence passed over the detective's face.

"There's your man," said he in a low voice, "just getting on the elevator—light gloves—silk hat!"

Forbes had evidently come in, shadowing his prey, and in some occult way had signaled him out to his co-worker.

Stephen stepped on the elevator, and went up with Sloan.

The detective held a moment's conversation with Forbes, then slipped to the telephone box, closed the double doors and called up the nearest police station.

Sloan was unlocking his door when Stephen accosted him.

"Your name is Sloan, I believe? I have some business with you."

"Business? Is it not rather late for business? Come around in the morning, say ten o'clock," said Sloan. He bowed and stood smiling. He was carefully dressed, his hair falling low on his forehead; and the lower part of his face was covered with a short dark beard. The ends of his moustache were waxed and curled. There flashed across Stephen's mind Mary's descriptive phrase, "very polite."

"I will see you to-night," said Stephen.

The man paused a moment, irresolute, then opened his door and stepped in. Stephen followed. It was a medium-sized room, with a round table in the center, over which burned a low gas jet. Sloan made a careless pretense of turning up the light, removed his overcoat and threw it across the bed, then stood waiting,

still polite, a little frown very naturally gathering on his face.

"Well?" said he.

"I wish to speak with you about Mary North."

The man's face took on instantly a look of utter bewilderment.

"Mary North?—Mary North?—My dear sir, you must have mistaken your man. I have not the honor of knowing any lady of that name."

"You have mistaken your man if you think I can be put off this way. Mary North was my uncle's ward. You sneaked an acquaintance with her in Westland last fall, under the name of Le Cygne, took advantage of her innocence and ignorance, got possession of her property and lured her to her ruin. You will answer me my question, and answer it now. *Where is Mary North?* After that you will settle with the courts for obtaining property under false pretenses, and also, by the way, for that little complicity in the Fairchild case. That—"

Sloan's face, always pale, became livid. There was a dart of his thin hand toward his hip pocket, but quicker than a flash Stephen had thrown himself forward upon him. The two went down together, Sloan doubled up underneath. Stephen's clutch was on his throat.

"So you would shoot me, you infernal scoundrel," raged Stephen. He wrenched the murderous hand, limp as a rag in his terrible grasp, out of the fellow's pocket, and jerked the pistol from it. It fell on the floor under the window, half across the room. Stephen planted a suffocating knee on the chest of the prostrate man.

"Where is Mary North?" His face was white as death.

"I—I don't know," said Le Cygne thickly. "I—I'm choking! Le' me go! 'Fore God I don't know. I hain't seen her since—she run away. Oh! I can't breathe!"

"How did you entrap her?"

"I—oh! You're killing me! I—le' me up and I'll tell y' everything."

"You'll tell me without my letting you up"—then as the man still delayed—"and you'll tell me now."

The awful grip began to tighten.

"Oh! I will! Jus' le' me breathe!" gurgled the man.

Stephen relaxed his hold a little.

"Tell me, then."

"I did—did—meet her in Westland, and she said she would be lonesome in Boston and asked me to call on her. So I went to see her occasionally. Then after she went on to the street—a man ain't a saint to say no always to these—"

The voice suddenly ceased. There was a convulsive movement of the limbs, and the wretch turned black in the face, his lying tongue protruding.

Stephen got up from the unconscious form. He threw up his arms in agony.

"God! God!" he cried. "I'm afraid I shall kill him!"

He turned away. He stumbled over the limp body and kicked it spurningly away from him. He did not look at it further nor notice that the purple blood was clearing out of the face. All the long anger and agony of the months broke out at last. He raged back and forth across the room. His face was convulsed.

Heavy groans burst from his lips. The form on the floor crawled stealthily, inch by inch, toward the window. The treacherous right hand clutched the pistol. A shot rang out—another—another! Stephen fell. The door was burst open and the detectives and officers rushed in. But Sloan, agile as a panther, was on his feet. He sprang at the closed window, burst through sash and glass and jumped thirty feet into the court.

CHAPTER XVI

POOR MARY!

It was eight o'clock of an August evening in Chicago, and in the midst of a "torrid term," as a newspaper alliteratively announced it. Slowly, relentlessly, all summer long, that great creature, the City, had been gathering heat through its enormous sprawling body of brick and iron and stone, and now like some carnivorous monster was devouring its own offspring. The splendid houses set in wide stretches of green along the shady avenues had tightly shut and barricaded their carved and gilded portals—their owners fled. But the great tenements along narrow streets which never know the merciful shade of a tree or the relieving greenness of a spear of grass—these had opened wide their battered doors and cast forth their suffering multitudes. The wooden sidewalks were choked with pallid children. They tried listlessly to play or sat still in old endurance. The parks were not a mile away, yet many of these little ones had never seen a tree or flower growing, or a sod of wholesome green grass. It costs money to ride on the street-cars. Even worse, it takes a certain amount of enterprising ambition to plan such a journey, and these people had long ago been emptied of all ambition. The doorsteps were crowded. In many places men and boys lay about on backyard ash-piles, or in the bottom of long traffic wagons, or even along the edges of the sidewalks, out into the

untidy streets in front. They were in socks or barefooted. Their colored shirts were opened wide at the neck and the sleeves were rolled up, the men's big muscles showing. The windows were full of slatternly women, leaning far out and sometimes talking with their neighbors. Some were nursing pale babies at their breasts. The day was slowly waning, but the hot breath of the city's torment ascended still.

Sadie and Evalyn Spencer came home together from Smith and Smiths' where they were still "clerking it." They ate their supper at the table pushed up against the wall in the combination kitchen and dining-room. It had been too hot for a fire, so their mother—a decent, elderly woman, with a kind, wrinkled face and scanty hair, and an unselfish devotion to the welfare of the family—had opened a can of cold corned beef for the girls, instead of the hot meat she usually gave them at night. This, with white soft "home-made" bread from the bakery around the corner, plentifully spread with dripping yellow butter, furnished the main part of the meal. Half of a lemon cream pie from the same convenient source of supply, flavoring and soggy crust being much in evidence, supplied the dessert. The girls ate by themselves. The children were "through" before they came; the father, a teamster, had not yet come home. The mother—she never sat down at the table except for Sunday dinner, which was the only meal of the week which saw all the family at home together. She just "snacked" along whenever she felt hungry.

Supper over and the mother clearing away the dishes, the girls discussed a walk. Sadie demurred.

"Oh, let's go!" said Evalyn. "I'm tired, too, but

it's sweltering here. Let's go over to Jefferson Square —it must be cooler there."

Sadie yielded at last, as she usually did, to this younger sister. They walked slowly west across the bridge, then turned north. The streets were clotted with people — they had come to one of the most crowded parts of Chicago, more people living above the ground in some of these high tenements than could have been buried below the ground side by side. The two picked their way among the children on the crowded walk. A little fellow of about three, clad only in a ragged slip, lay on the sidewalk near an alley way, whining miserably. One of his dirty brown knees was bleeding from a fresh cut. None of those about him gave him the slightest attention.

"Wait a minute," said Sadie.

The kind-hearted girl set the little fellow on his feet with a comforting word, and he stopped crying to stare at her with big-eyed curiosity.

Evalyn had been improving the moment by looking about her.

"Oh, look there!" said she, seizing her sister's arm. "Ain't you afraid he'll fall?"

The object of her solicitude was a man lying stretched out on a board thrown over a narrow alley from window to window of the second story. A leg dangled over the side. One careless movement and he would drop fifteen feet.

"Do you suppose he means to sleep that way all night?" pursued Evalyn.

Sadie did not answer. She, too, was gazing up, but not at the venturesome seeker for coolness. A woman's white face at the window directly above him

had caught her eye. The fading daylight hardly penetrated to the spot, but a street lamp shone full upon the face as the head rested back in utter weariness against the window frame. The eyes were closed, the form motionless. The woman might have been dead but that she sat upright in the window seat.

"Look there, Evvie! Don't that look like Mary South?" whispered Sadie. "There! In the window—right above the man. It *is* her! Look at her hair—just them curves!"

"I don't know," said Evalyn. "I never saw her but once or twice, you know."

"It *is* Mary. How sick she looks! Look here, Evalyn, I'm going up."

"Oh, don't, Sade! We hain't got any too much time now, and it's so hot!"

"I'm going," was the decided reply, "and you'd better come along. I don't believe mother'd like you to be alone among these people."

Sadie pushed her way through the people on the doorstep, her sister unwillingly following. She made her way up the two flights of dark, creaking stairs. Evalyn clung to her, frightened and protesting, but Sadie persisted. Pausing a moment to take her bearings, she knocked at a door. A white-haired old man came in answer, a little black dog at his heels barking and snapping viciously.

"I am looking for Mary South," said Sadie. "I thought she roomed here."

The old man motioned toward the right, and shut the door without a word.

"Oh, Sadie," wailed Evvie, softly. "Do let's go back. It's just like ghosts!"

Sadie knocked at the next door. It was opened by Mary herself.

"Why! Why!"—exclaimed Sadie, in astonishment beyond words.

Mary was fearfully changed. The round young cheeks had sunken away, and the face had the characteristic pallor of the neighborhood. Even the temples were emaciated, the delicate veins marked in violet over them. A wave of red shame swept over her face as she saw Sadie, and she instinctively snatched up an old black cape and gathered its concealing folds about her.

Sadie stood a moment, her sister behind her staring. Then she went straight to the smitten girl, put her arms around her and kissed her.

"You poor thing!" said she. "I never was so sorry for anybody in my life."

Mary had thought many times that she could never cry again, but now she burst into convulsive weeping. The two sat down together on the side of the bed. Sadie drew the sobbing girl toward her, pillowing Mary's head on her compassionate shoulder. Suddenly Mary drew back.

"Oh! Oh! I'm a ruined girl, Sadie, don't you see?"

"Ruined fiddlesticks!" said Sadie. She would not be repulsed.

Mary broke out weeping aloud.

"I thought you wouldn't speak to me when you knew. You said once to Vinnie when she was just talking about—when she was just joking—that she wasn't hardly fit for a decent girl to speak to. I felt like death all the time I was at Smith and Smiths' because I was a living lie. But I wanted to save

Vinnie. God wouldn't let me because— But, oh, I thought—I thought I was legally married. There was a ceremony, but I found out afterward it was a mock marriage."

"There, there, you poor dear!" said Sadie, soothingly. "You don't have to tell me a thing. And don't you talk about ruin. Don't you suppose I know a good girl when I see her? And I'd never believe anything bad of you, Mary, never—specially after the way you worked to keep Vinnie straight, so there!"

"But I'm sorry you found me," sobbed Mary. "I thought I should just die and nobody'd know."

"Die? You're not goin' to die," said Sadie briskly. "You're going to live. And once over this—"

"Oh, don't!" screamed Mary. "I *want* to die. You don't know *how* I want to die. And my baby, too! Oh, I can't live—I can't—can't live—don't talk to me about it!" She sprang up, her eyes aflame in her white face.

Sadie was unspeakably shocked. Not till now had she fully realized the terrible change in Mary. How fearful must have been the suffering that had turned the brave, self-controlled girl she had known at Smith and Smiths' into this desperate, half-insane creature.

"Well, never mind," she said soothingly. "But do sit down and tell me what you've been doing all this time. Evvie and I went 'round to Mrs. Turner's to call on you, but you had gone, and we couldn't find track nor trace of you. Do tell me, Mary. I'm dying to hear it all."

Little by little the pitiful story came out.

Mary had finally secured a place in a "ready-made

clothing factory," which proved to be a veritable sweat-shop. Her work was making sleeve linings for men's custom-made coats, and it was to be paid for by the piece. The foreman had assured her that she could easily earn six or seven dollars a week as soon as she learned to operate the machine, but she soon found that with her greatest efforts she could not clear more than four dollars, and the sum was usually less. While she had been looking for work, the money she had brought with her to Chicago had nearly all gone, and in a courageous effort to "get a little ahead" for coming emergencies she had left her boarding-place at Mrs. Turner's, rented the little back bedroom in which Sadie had found her, and begun to board herself. Her diet had been chiefly the stale bread which bakers sell to the very poorest at two or three cents a loaf. Milk was an unthought of luxury, but remembering the old woman's story Mary had substituted weak tea. Meat and potatoes she had no time to cook; neither had she the conveniences for cooking, the small room containing only the bed, one chair, a table—now covered with boys' coats—a small unpainted cupboard and a little kerosene cooking lamp. It had been hard enough to live at Mrs. Turner's; but this—though Mary herself did not in the least recognize the fact and wondered where all her strength and courage had gone—this was literally slow starvation. Magendie's dogs, fed upon fine wheat bread only, died in forty days.

In July, Mary had been discharged from the factory with coarse insult. Since that time she had done work in her room, hiring a little boy to carry the garments back and forth.

"I had thirteen dollars ahead at one time," said she. "But I was sick, and the folks in the house called a doctor and got some medicine. And I didn't want them to call a doctor. And I lost a week, too, and that took it all and more."

"What do you pay for this beastly little room?" asked Sadie, looking disgustedly about her.

"Two dollars a week. At first it was only a dollar and a half, but the man raised the price, and I couldn't find anything cheaper. I didn't have time to look much, and I suppose he knew it. But I am behind now, and he says—he says that if I don't—pay all up next Saturday—"

She broke down crying again. She was in a state bordering on utter collapse.

"He says you've got to get out, I suppose," said Sadie with fine scorn. "He's charging you twice as much as the little hole's worth anyway. Makes two hundred per cent on his money if he makes a cent. But what are you going to do, you poor dear?"

"Oh, I don't know—I don't know! I thought I should have died before this."

Sadie meditated intently for a moment.

"Mary South," she said finally, with absolute, flint-like decision in every tone of her voice and line of her face. "You're goin' to just pick up your things and come home with me."

"Yes, do!" urged Evalyn, blindly following her sister's lead.

"Oh, I can't—I can't think of it! You haven't room for me—I know you're crowded. It's so kind of you to offer it. But you mustn't take a woman like me into your home."

"Woman like you! You make me tired, Mary South. What kind of a woman do you think you are? You're just as good as me, only for that infernal scoundrel. Oh, I know men—some men—Mallory, for instance. Now you've just got to come. And I've got a lovely plan for the baby!"

"Oh, thank you, Sadie, but I can't think of it."

"I don't want you to think of it. I'll do the thinking. The only thing you're to do is to come. You needn't talk, dear, I won't hear a word. It's all settled and you can't help yourself. Just pack your things—or wait, Evvie and I'll do it for you—and come right along with us this minute. Ma'll be glad to see you, too."

It was an audacious proposal to add one more to the family, and Sadie knew it. The Spencer domicile was a respectable back flat of five rooms. It gave bed room to nine people, and furnished them a combination kitchen and dining-room, and a living-room besides; yet it was not overcrowded, according to the standards of the locality, even when the thermometer stood literally in the hundreds. A tiny passage-way from the street stairs led straight back and opened into the kitchen and dining-room quite in the rear of the flat. This room would have been the lightest and largest of all, only that from its further side had been cut off a small bedroom, occupied now by a roomer. As it was, the room was light, its large window obscured only by the fire-escape—that institution intended for an emergency, but of the greatest general convenience at all times in the homes of the poor, where it is often store-room and ice-box and backyard and balcony and flower garden. The next room back was entirely

dependent on the kitchen for light, but it had double doors that folded back and was not by any means dark. This was the living-room or sitting-room, and contained an ingrain carpet—a piece of undoubted luxury—and a folding-bed, in which at night slept the father and mother of the household with a little three-year-old girl. She was the child of a cousin, who, dying, had left her daughter without a home. The child had been taken into the family as a matter of course, the poorhouse or Children's Aid Society never entering the Spencer mind. Back still further from the living-room were two bedrooms, opening into the narrow passage-way and dimly lighted by an "air-well." The smaller of the two gave sleeping room at night to Sadie's two brothers, Tom, twenty-two years old, and Willie, ten. In the larger—the "girls' room" —was a double bed in which slept Sadie and Evalyn, and a low, sliding structure which in the daytime pushed, trundle-bed fashion, under the larger bed. This ingenious contrivance supplied a sleeping place for the youngest Spencer girl, Bess, twelve years old, and it was upon this that Sadie's strategic eye had fixed. In it she had more than once, being a trifle smaller than Evalyn, curled up with Bess, when the family hospitality had overflowed the bounds toward some relative or friend; and it was in it that she now intended to sleep, giving Mary her own half-bed. It did not occur to Sadie that she was extending a hospitality more than usually generous—she was simply doing as she would be done by. Nor did she feel that Mary's coming would crowd the family particularly. She had never had a room alone, nor indeed a bed alone, in all her life. But she did know that the flat with its noisy and

neighborly good cheer, for the Spencers were a home-loving and sociable family, would be an unspeakable improvement on the ill-smelling dreariness of Mary's present abode.

Mary did not cease to object, but everything went down before the hurricane of Sadie's hospitable plans. In five minutes her poor belongings were wrapped in a newspaper — her satchel had long ago been pawned —the package of goods on the table had been put into the hands of the boy with directions to take them back and tell the foreman the lady would not take any more work at present, Mary's old cape—for which she had exchanged her jacket—was about her shoulders and they were on the street. Fifteen minutes later she was smuggled into the "girls' room" and put to bed, and kind-faced "Ma Spencer" was purring over her, with a poached egg and a cup of chocolate.

Three days afterward Tom Spencer was peremptorily invited to sleep out in the park for a night or two—his room was wanted for Sadie's particular friend. His mother assured him that the fresh air would do him a world of good, that the house was altogether too hot to sleep in anyway, that she'd a-most a mind to try the park herself, only she s'posed it wouldn't do, bein' as she was a woman. Or he could go to a dime lodging house if he preferred. Tom good-naturedly acquiesced and slept on a bench in the park that night and for a week afterward. His younger brother was put on an improvised bed in the kitchen.

Then, one morning Mary lay, a tiny head pillowed on her arm and a weak little heart fluttering against hers. But in an hour the little heart ceased to beat, and Sadie, who was losing a week of work at Smith

and Smiths', stooped down, the tears dropping over her cheeks, to unclasp the clinging mother-arms.

"Don't cry, Sadie," said Ma Spencer, crying herself as if her heart would break. "Don't cry. Poor little thing, all skin and bone! We might a' known it couldn't live, with all Mary's gone through. It's better off. An' what in the world would she have done with it?"

"But I wanted to adopt it!" said Sadie, crying harder than ever. "Mary'd a' let me, I know."

"Why, that would a' been real nice!" said Ma Spencer.

Three weeks passed. Mary was back in the girls' room—living in spite of herself—so grateful, so patient, so humble, so altogether pathetic, that over and over Ma Spencer declared she "couldn't look at the poor lamb without crying"; the sympathetic utterance sometimes varied by a grimly expressed belief that "a day of reckonin' 'ud come for some folks, and she hoped to goodness it 'ud be a heavy reckonin', too!" For the first time in her kind-hearted life the good woman began to have a fear that the Judge of all the earth might be too merciful.

"S'posin' 't 'ad been our Evvie?" she said to Sadie fifty times. Then she would turn away, choking with mingled wrath and compassion.

For a while, after it was over, Mary lay benumbed in mind and body. Then the reaction came and she began to get well. It was slow work. The results of such intense mental suffering as she had undergone, coupled with the physical privation of months, were not to be quickly effaced. She was depressed almost to the point of monomania. Her wholesome surroundings

had, however, nearly won her back to a normal mental condition, when one day she unfortunately overheard a laughing reference to Tom's sleeping in the park. She was horrified at the discovery, and in her weakness began to feel herself a burden in the home. She had to be left much alone—the Spencers were busy people—and as she dwelt on the thought, she became more and more morbid over it. Why must she add this to all the rest—to come into this kind family and make so much trouble and expense? She tried to talk it over with Sadie and plan for going away, but she was met by a sweeping repudiation of the whole idea.

"You shall stay right where you are," declared that stout-hearted girl. "You are my own special guest till you get quite well and strong. And then we'll find work for you—decent work at decent pay, too. You needn't shake your head, Mary—I'll do it as sure's my name's Sarah Ann Spencer. I couldn't get it for myself, but I can for a girl like you. You're a treasure, Mary—you don't half understand your own value. If I could carry myself with the air you do I wouldn't be workin' at Smith and Smiths' for four dollars a week and one per cent! Oh, I haven't lived in Chicago all my life without getting on to a thing or two. You'll just break my heart, dear, if you go away. I simply won't hear another word."

But Mary, forbidden to talk, dwelt all the more on the idea with suffering sensitiveness, and all the more the monstrousness of her presence in the family grew in her eyes. Then one day came the additional thought scorching its way across her poor brain, that the shadow of her shame would fall upon these good people. Not that they had ever hinted it—they were

too kind for that—but it could not fail. Oh! what should she do? She must go away.

She was up and walking weakly about the room that afternoon. She trembled—her thoughts were whirling. Could she go now? Why not? She was strong enough, she was sure. How still the house was! The older children went to school, she knew, and the grown folks were away all day at their work — all but Mrs. Spencer and the little one, and just now even they were busy in the sitting-room. Yes, now was her chance. She wrote a little note with shaking fingers and fastened it to Sadie's pincushion. Then she found her hat in the crowded bureau drawer, which stuck and creaked as she pulled it carefully out, threw her old cape about her shoulders and crept fearfully into the little hall. She slipped past the threatening front flat doors that might open upon her any time, and out into the street. The fresh air—it was late September now—made her feel stronger. A flush of color came to her white cheeks. Ma Spencer's careful nursing and nourishing food had given her some strength, she gratefully thought.

She walked east. She feared to return to the neighborhood of her old room, knowing that Sadie would at once seek her there. She crossed South Clark Street, its octopus eyes and arms asleep at that time of day. Then came Dearborn Street, and then gay, low South State, crowded with rushing streams of humanity.

Just as Mary, in crossing State Street, stepped on the cable-car tracks, she distinctly saw on the sidewalk toward which she was going, the tall form of Stephen Bayard. He was walking slowly along, looking about

him. Mary stopped short with distended eyes. There swept over her a wave of intense joy and longing—surely God had sent him to her for just this dreadful emergency. He would help her, she knew. She took a step forward with a glad cry. Then she stopped short in a sudden agony of shameful remembrance. Oh, no! He must not see her! Never—never again! *He* must not know—not for worlds! She tried to turn—to fly! But her feet would not move. And now—her eyes still fastened on Stephen—she saw him stop and put his hand to his forehead. Some subtle influence made him look around confusedly—he felt her nearness. Oh! where should she hide in the pitiless street! Oh, oh! The eyes of these millions of people were on her! And everyone of them knew all her shame! She heard indistinctly the sound of many voices, of excited cries —they were shouting it aloud! Then—a hand pulled her violently backward while just in front of her crunched along the wheels of a train of cable-cars, brake screaming on the iron rails. She shut her eyes. It was Stephen's hand she knew. But no!—it was a red-faced policeman who was holding her in his angry grasp.

"Here, there! An' what are ye about?" cried he ferociously.

"I—I was just thinking," said Mary, like one wakened out of a sleep.

The man, seeing her face, relaxed his hand and spoke more gently.

"The next toime ye think, ye'd betther not sthand on the strate-car tr-rack to do it. Ef I hadn't jerked the head nigh off ye, ye'd been kilt to shmidereens wid yer thinkin'."

"I'm sorry," said Mary, with trembling lips. "I'll go now, thank you."

The man escorted her across the street, looking doubtfully at her white face. Stephen had disappeared and Mary again thanked her protector and hastened on. Her limbs were shaking beneath her. She crossed Wabash Avenue with its elevated trains thundering overhead, and came to stately Michigan Avenue. The lake was before her, so she turned north and walked slowly on. There was a grassy, park-like space at one side, with seats scattered here and there. She sat down on one and rested a long time. Stephen's face gleamed before her eyes—now troubled, now kind. Oh! — she was back in the dandelion dell again with him! The picture of the fern-covered rocks and the spreading beech trees rose vividly in her mind. And even the flower and the little bee! She smiled happily. Then suddenly the vision melted away and she remembered — she was in Chicago — a lost, lost soul. The roar of the city was behind her, the roar of the lake before her. The white-capped waves were rolling in—how beautiful they were! And how pure! They ran up toward her, one after another, as if trying to help her. They beckoned her to come—they would wash her clean of her shame. Why, Stephen was there, too—she remembered it all now—how he had gone across the water. Stephen—and room—and rest—in the blue water! How the waves called—and called—and called! Come—come! Rest—rest! Yes, she would go. She rose—the motion startled her back to reason. Oh, no, she mustn't do *that!* It was a temptation again. "Get thee behind me, Satan." Was it indeed Stephen calling her? Oh, no! he was in Germany.

Daylight was fading. A policeman walked past her, eyeing her sharply. He turned and walked past again —this South Clark Street stray had clearly drifted out of her place. Mary saw him and was afraid. She rose and walked weakly on. She had no idea where she was going or what she was going to do. She did not yet suffer from acute anxiety or fear, but as the streets grew darker and more deserted, and great wholesale buildings loomed frowning, she turned west and walked to State Street, on which she went north again. State Street was aflame with light. There were gorgeously glowing saloons, and drugstores with their colored lights, and brilliantly illuminated theaters with elegant carriages standing before them, and cafés and candy shops invitingly near. There was even a florist's shop, its two great windows a mass of roses and asters.

Strange fancies began to float through Mary's hot brain. She was walking along quietly, when she suddenly perceived that she was growing very tall. How long her arm was! Why, it would reach quite across the street! How astonished these people would be if she should once stretch it out! The idea amused her a little. She remembered a picture she had seen once in a child's book of tales. It was of a little girl enormously overgrown, and the story with it told how, as the child strode along over the country in a morning ramble, she picked up a yoke of oxen with their hay rick still fastened to them, and hung them like a rose in her belt. It had been a childish wonder to Mary how this could be, but now at last she understood it. It was very pleasant to be so much taller than other people—only it made her feet so heavy. Why, she could hardly lift them!

The night was cool, but Mary was very warm. There was a curious crackling in her ears, as if something in her brain had become loosened. Her cheeks were burning, her eyes brilliant. As she passed slowly through a white electric light streaming from a saloon on a corner, a coarse man spoke to her. She turned and looked at him and he shrank back as if she had struck him.

"Hello, Joe! Seen a ghost?" called out a companion.

The man smothered an oath.

"She's crazy as a loon," said he.

Mary walked on over the bridge and a block or two beyond. She did not consciously recognize the locality, but her unguided feet followed a way which they had trodden once before—the day she had led the old woman to the Deaconess Home—just as, in entering an auditorium the second time one certainly, unless otherwise directed, walks to the right or to the left, according to the way he walked the first time he entered. It was darker now, except at the corners where there were saloons, and little chills of cold came over the wanderer. The fever mist cleared away a little from her mind, and she was no longer tall and strong, but only a poor, friendless girl with no home! Was there no place for her to go? The great round earth was so large and she so little! Was there no place at all on its wide surface where she could rest awhile? Mother was resting—all these years. Oh, she would go back to Westland—it seemed very easy to do—and mother would take her in, she knew, in her little quiet bed under the pleasant grass. Why, how strange it was that she had never thought of it before!

But she couldn't go just now—she was so tired. She sat down stealthily on the edge of the sidewalk. A great noise of confused music and shouting came from the saloon a few doors away — perhaps if she kept very still she could rest here a little while. Her head sank over her hands. A policeman came up behind her and spoke imperatively, "Move on!" but she did not hear him. He struck her lightly with his baton, and she sprang terrified to her feet.

"Move on, there!" he repeated, a little less gruffly as he saw her face. "We can't let folks lop 'round on the street. They has to keep movin'."

Mary started on in desperate terror. "Has to keep moving! — has to keep moving!" began to say itself over and over in her brain. She turned a corner away from the dreaded policeman.

But now she was growing tall again—and stumbling—oh!—

She lurched and fell forward without a cry.

"Poor chile! Poor tired out chile!"

It was not a policeman that came across the prostrate body, but a little old woman. She had just left the large brick house with the lights in the windows and was hurrying down the street. Her head and shoulders were covered with a black knit shawl and she wore a scant gown of blue cotton goods with white dots printed over it. She turned the body over and anxiously sought the heart, murmuring softly to herself.

"I'm afeared—I'm afeared! Oh, this is a hard world for the poor young things—no, it's a-beatin'! She ain't dead!"

She tore off her shawl, rolled it into a bundle and, gently lifting Mary's head, slipped it beneath. The face came into view in the light of a street lamp. Mary opened her eyes.

"Oh, my, my! Oh, my good gracious," cried the woman. "It—it ain't—yes, it is! I couldn't forget her purty face! It's the blessed angel as was so kind to me that day! An' now what'll I do? The policeman'll be 'round in a minnit."

She lifted herself up, in her perplexity nursing unconsciously one of her wrists, a little deformed, in the other hand. Suddenly she caught sight of the lights of the house she had just left, and started to run toward it as fast as her short legs would carry her. Her gray head bobbed along in the lamplight.

One of the deaconesses answered the old woman's violent ring at the door.

"Why, Auntie King! What in the world—"

"Oh, Sister!" panted the old woman. "I've found a poor girl an' it's the one who was so good to me. She's faint or sick. Do come!"

The deaconess took the old woman's arm and together they ran down the steps and over to the place where Mary lay.

"It's the one—the one that brought me to you Christmas—when I broke my wrist, you know," the old woman managed to gasp out. "I knowed her sweet face the minnit I set eyes on it."

Mary had revived a little and was trying to rise.

"Has to keep moving! Has to keep moving!" she murmured, looking up at them with terrified, fascinated eyes.

The two women lifted her to her feet, and half lead-

ing, half carrying her, got her into the house they had just left. She sank into an easy chair.

"What is your name, dear?" asked the deaconess. She spoke very gently, as she would have done to a little child.

"Mary—they call me Mary South."

A moment later Mary's eyelids fell in utter and long unconsciousness.

CHAPTER XVII

IN THE "CHAMBER OF PEACE"

The exposure and wearinesss of Mary's wanderings brought on a serious relapse. For weeks she lay in the white "Chamber of Peace" in the Deaconess Home, a room set apart for guests, but sheltering most frequently such guests as Mary. It had happened to be a trained nurse of the many-sided Sisterhood, Elizabeth Drew by name, who had helped bring Mary in. She had begged that the "case" might be given to her, and had watched over the stranger day and night, ministering to her as no mother, untrained, ever cared for a child.

There was fever and wild delirium at first, and little by little in broken sentences and with heart-rending cries, Mary told over her sad story. Sometimes she was making sleeve linings, and her thin fingers, still calloused, would move with desperate haste in pantomime sewing. Again she was at Smith and Smiths' selling ribbon and worrying over someone she called "Vinnie." Then she was wandering in the streets, moaning out her weariness and repeating her piteous refrain, "Has to keep moving!" Two or three times, however, she stopped short, with staring eyes, and cried out, "Oh! Oh! There's Stephen!"

Who "Stephen" was, the nurse could not guess. But she knew about Smith and Smiths'. She visited the ribbon department of the great store and, inquiring

about "Vinnie" and Mary South, was at once referred to Sadie Spencer. The faithful girl was overjoyed to hear of Mary's safety, and gladly poured into the ear of the deaconess all she knew of the sad story.

"And a truer and purer girl never lived, Sister, nor one that tried harder to help us all, and especially Vinnie. But she's got a wrong notion about herself. She thinks she's lost forever. I tried to talk it out of her, but I couldn't — but she'll listen to you, Sister. And that's why she wouldn't stay at our house, though we were all so glad to have her. She left a note saying she thought her being there would disgrace the family. But ma'll be so glad to know she's among friends. She's worried herself 'most sick over her, saying it might have been Evvie—that's my sister—and all alone in Chicago! And we couldn't find track nor trace of her. We were afraid"—she had to stop a moment. "She was sick, Sister, and most crazy. And no wonder either."

"Do you know anything about her home or her friends?"

"Not a thing. She wasn't the talking kind, and you never could ask her questions as you could some girls. But she carried herself like a lady, every inch, and when she first came, her hands showed she'd never done no hard work. And she was one of our very best saleswomen and everybody liked her. If you can just make her see, Sister, that she wan't so much to blame, why, that'd do more good than anything else."

"I'll try."

"And can I come and see her—when she gets better?"

"Yes, of course. It will do her good."

The deaconess said goodbye and turned away.

"Good Shepherd," she prayed in her heart, "give me this one more lost lamb of Thine." And even as she prayed for the "lost lamb" a plan formed in her mind.

With returning reason Mary gradually recalled the past. She did not weep or complain, but she seemed to shrink away into herself, lying motionless for hours. Questions were manifestly very painful to her.

One day Sister Elizabeth sat down by her side and began in her low, musical voice:

"When I was a little girl I lived in the country—my father was a farmer. I can shut my eyes and see it all—the old farmhouse, and the well and garden. My father had horses and cattle, and a great flock of sheep. We children liked the sheep best of all, and especially the lambs—awkward little white things!"

Mary's lips tightened. The doctor had kept a few sheep, too.

"Then, when the lambs were older, father used to turn them out to eat grass with their mothers in the 'old orchard.' It was on a hillside—the big neglected apple trees all mossy and gnarled and beautiful. We children used to climb up to the friendly crooks of the low branches, and sit with our bare feet hanging down, while we munched the wormy little green apples. And sometimes, if we kept very still, the lambs would come nibbling along right under us! There were young hemlock trees and juniper bushes growing up among the old apple trees, and a little farther back toward the mountain there were dark woods of pine and hemlock, with rocks and precipices. Sometimes a lamb would wander away from the flock and get lost in the woods. Poor little thing—running about and crying!"

Mary's hand trembled a little in the strong warm clasp of the deaconess.

"But father always sent someone right out to find it—father knew every single one of his lambs. Many a time I have gone with my brothers, walking about the woods with a lantern—calling and calling—and stopping every little while to listen for a lamb's cry. It was all they knew—just to cry."

There was a long pause. Mary lay with her eyes closed, but the muscles about her sensitive lips were quivering.

"I remember what a time we had one night to find a little bleating thing that had been caught in a thorny juniper bush. Its skin was all torn and bleeding. It was father himself who found that lamb."

Another pause.

"And what do you think father did with the poor thing? Punish it for running away? He just gathered the little crying creature tenderly up in his strong arms and carried it home. It was still his lamb, you see. It hadn't turned into a wolf."

Mary opened her eyes, large from the purple shadows about them, and fixed them startled and questioning on the face of the deaconess.

"And is not God as kind as man?" said Sister Elizabeth, looking straight at her charge, with answering eyes of heavenly compassion.

Mary threw up both hands with a cry of agony.

"Oh! Oh!" she cried. "You wouldn't talk to me like that if you—if you knew. You wouldn't let me stay in your house. I've no right to be here. I'm an outcast— I'm lost! But I will go now. Oh, let me go!"

She started up wildly, struggling with her weakness. The pupils of her dry eyes were widely distended, the hard black blotting out the violet. Reason was giving way at last.

"Don't! Don't, poor lamb! I do know!" cried the nurse in eager haste. "That's why I told you about the Father." Tears of sympathy were running down her cheeks. She could not thrust down the struggling form, so she drew it to herself, pillowing the poor head in the loving hollow of her own breast. "I know all, or almost all—the cruel deception in Boston, and about the—the little baby. You told it in your fever —when you didn't know what you were saying. And Sadie told me some, too—I went down to talk with her. And see! Don't I love you still? There, there! Can't you cry, poor lamb? Do cry—it will do you good. Of course we won't let you go away—not till you're quite well, and want to go."

Mary, uncomprehending, stared at the deaconess.

"Mary, listen," said Sister Elizabeth, solemnly. "I am speaking the truth before God, 'whose I am and whom I serve.' I do not blame you—no one could—for the dreadful thing that has happened to you. I hold you just as pure as I am myself. Do not these arms prove it—and this kiss? There! Lie down again. You're not strong enough to sit up so long, little sister. Now we must talk this matter all over. You must let me help you. You're my little lost lamb, but I've found you and I'm going to bring you home. It will break my heart if my blundering efforts should only frighten you farther away on the dark mountains."

Mary lay back on her pillow. The insane look was

gone from her eyes, but her face was ashen and her breath came and went in short, shallow gasps.

"Wait a moment," said the nurse. "Drink this. There!"

It was a powerful stimulant. Then the pillow must be smoothed, and a tiny wrinkle or two drawn out of the spotless sheets. A shade seemed to need lowering, and a glass of water must be brought.

Then after this little time of rest, the trained, loving woman came again to Mary's side and with a skill drawn from two worlds set herself to probing and healing this grievous wound. It could not be done all at once, but a beginning was made. Mary answered questions freely—confidence in the deaconess at least had been secured. To establish again Mary's confidence in herself would be far more difficult. She had so long regarded herself as "lost" both to earth and Heaven that it would be almost like a new creation to bring her back to self-respect and hope. But the deaconess, after the beautiful way of her Order, "took it to the Lord in prayer," then steadily applied herself, day after day, to her task. Argument, illustration, assertion, a bearing of calm assurance—these all did their work. But far more effective was the wonder wrought out before the very eyes of the suffering girl—that this pure beautiful woman who knew all the dreadful things of her past, did not loathe her, did not shrink from her, but actually loved and trusted her.

In talking of herself Mary began always with her Boston experience. The deaconess tried warily to find out about her friends.

"Do your people at home know you are in Chicago?" she asked.

"My father died when I was a baby," answered Mary, "and my mother"—she stopped with a choke—"she died, too."

"But have you no brothers or sisters?"

Mary shook her head.

"I have no relatives only some second cousins that I don't know at all. There were only the doctor's folks—they were very kind—he was my guardian. I wrote him, but—"

Mary's face had colored deeply, and she seemed on the verge of a breakdown. Just at that moment the attention of her listener was diverted by a knock at the door, and the sentence was never finished. The deaconess was left with the impression that Mary had written to her guardian and had been repulsed by him.

But this mention of the doctor led Mary to confess with many tears how she had "lost her religion."

"I ought to have told the doctor when that man first called on me. I prayed about it and I felt led to tell him. But it was very hard. The doctor is a quiet man and does not talk much, and I was afraid he would think I was foolish. But after it all happened —while I was on the cars coming west—then I saw how I had sinned, and how God was punishing me, and—"

"No!" cried Sister Elizabeth, vehemently. "God isn't like that. He wouldn't treat a poor, motherless little girl like that."

But Mary went on brokenly, telling of her further "backsliding"—no praying, no church-going.

"I have gone away from God," she said, "and he has left me in my sin."

"You didn't go away—you didn't!" cried the deaconess, vehemently. "You were not to blame,

poor lamb! You thought you were married. It's dreadful for you to think of yourself as a sinner—that kind of a sinner. It's wrong, Mary. And it's dreadful to think such things of God. Oh, it is shocking how people misunderstand our Heavenly Father!"

"Then why did He let it happen, Sister? I was praying about it all the time—all the time till it came to me on the train the kind of a woman I was, and I didn't dare to pray any more. Oh, I can't understand why God did it!"

"God didn't do it," insisted the deaconess. "The devil did it."

"But God permitted it. Why did He permit it when I asked His help? Oh, I did not follow the light! I ought to have told my guardian. God is punishing me!—Oh! Oh!"

Mary's excitement was rising to the danger point. The nurse's instinct in Sister Elizabeth was aroused. She bent over her patient, holding the fluttering hands in her strong, calm grasp.

"I don't understand it either, Mary. But *I trust!* I can't answer back to God, nor explain His ways, but I love Him, and I know He loves me. And He loves you, too, dear Think of the lost lamb in the woods—can you not imagine that the foolish, suffering little thing alone in the dark might say to itself, 'Why did the shepherd ever let me get away? He surely cannot love me.' But my father *did* care for his sheep. He did love his little lambs—those that strayed away as well as those that stayed at home. I know my father's love."

A smile of perfect peace shone on the face of the devoted woman.

"And I can know God's love, too," she continued with the strong downward inflection of perfect conviction. "He loves you, Mary—He's sent me after you. Don't try to understand, dear lamb, you're not strong enough to think it out. Don't even try to pray just yet—only trust Him—Him and me! We'll bring you home all right!"

And Mary sighed a long trembling sigh, and leaning on this strong, sweet soul began to hope.

Weeks passed. The faithful Sadie called repeatedly, with her healthy common sense and contagious courage. Then, constrained by the loving urgency of the deaconess, Mary had ventured to take up again her old habits of religion. Her mind was resuming its healthy balance. She began to read the books and papers that Sister Elizabeth cunningly left in her way, and to take an interest again in the life of the world.

"Oh, Sister," said she, abruptly, one day. "What can be done for us girls?"

"For you? Why, in just one hour and ten minutes I am going to bring you your dinner. That's what can be done for you."

"I know—thank you—and I can never repay you—"

"Oh, hush! I work by the day, dear, and get my pay in Heaven's gold of joy and love every sundown. But what do you mean by 'us girls,' Mary?"

"The shop girls and factory girls. Can't something be done for them? You see—"

"Yes, I know."

"There's always such dreadful danger for them. They're just girls, you know, and there are so many more of them than are wanted. The moment one

leaves her place there are twenty others struggling to get it. But those that don't get places—what can be done for them?"

"Oh!" Sister Elizabeth stopped her work and dropped into a chair by Mary's side. "You've struck my very greatest fad. I'm immensely interested in that question, Mary. Nobody wants these girls—that is, the overflow, scores and thousands of them—in the shops and stores, but there's one place in which they are wanted. It's in housework, Mary. Think what a demand there is for them there."

"Yes, but there's just where they won't go. I thought of it once, and I would have tried it, too, but Vinnie wouldn't hear of it for a moment, and I couldn't leave her. Then, too, I didn't have any references. But the girls won't do it, Sister. They'd rather starve."

"Maybe they would do it, if the conditions were changed. But, Mary, I'm not sorry Vinnie didn't try it. The work would have been all right for you, but not for your friend. Do you know, Mary, statistics show that—but, never mind. You're not fit for statistics yet. But the ordinary girl at service is often very lonely and is exposed to many dangers, not the least of which is the loss of her self-respect in feeling that everybody looks down upon her. The conditions are degrading."

"Then how could housework help us?"

"It couldn't as things are now, but I'd change the conditions—the whole environment. I'd make housework a profession, the same as nursing is. I was a regular professional nurse for four years before I came into this deaconess work—the best of anything in the

world—and I assure you I held my head high. A trained nurse thinks she's as good as anybody."

"Of course. Everybody else thinks so, too."

"But it was only fifty years ago or so that the business of nursing was as much despised as housework is now—more so, I think. Only the very lowest people would do it—ignorant, drunken men and women. The profession has been created within fifty years. It really started with us deaconesses—the German branch. Then it was taken up by Florence Nightingale in England, and—just look at the nurses now, with their diplomas and uniforms and societies and literature! Now I'd make doing housework a profession, too, just like nursing."

"Could you?" Mary's eyes were shining violet.

"Why not? There's nothing in housework that is really degrading—nothing more menial and disagreeable than many things in nursing. Why should cooking potatoes be so much more detested than cooking gruel?"

"It ought not to be, but—well, I think it's partly the long hours."

"Nurses have long hours, too. I do think, however, that the hours of the girl doing housework are too long. They could easily be shortened though, with just a little effort to systematize the work. I'll tell you, dear, it's partly prejudice—a caste feeling. There are so many ignorant girls in housework—girls that have no ambition nor aspiration. Then it's the lack of social life and the slatternly dress and—"

"Then you don't blame them so much?"

"I don't blame them at all. A girl can no more help wanting the respect of others, and pretty gowns,

and some social life, than she can help breathing. It's not her fault that she doesn't have these things in housework just as she does in stores and shops. It's the fault of our whole social system. Life doesn't mean just bread and butter and shoes."

"But could you change the social system?"

"I'd like a chance to try it. Oh, if I only—"

The face of the deaconess took on an expression of intense longing. She clasped her hands together and seemed to have quite forgotten her charge.

"But how would you do it, Sister? How would you break down this dreadful caste prejudice?" asked Mary.

"I wouldn't try to break it down. I'd create a new caste, just as the caste of trained nurses has been created. I'd start a school, Mary."

"Oh, Sister! And give up deaconess work?"

"No, indeed, I wouldn't have to give up deaconess work. We deaconesses are not confined to nursing and Church work; we can do anything we want to do —anything that needs to be done. I'd start a housekeeping school for girls and give them a thorough course of preparation. That's what makes the trained nurses, you know—the nurses' training school. I'd give them a two years' course, or three, or four, if they needed it. I'd make them really deserve their diplomas—for I'd give them diplomas, of course, tied with blue ribbon, just as if they were college graduates. I'd have all the best modern conveniences and appliances, and I'd hire the best professors—spell it with a capital P, too—and I'd have the most impressive graduating exercises with the greatest man to deliver the address that could be had for love or money. And engraved invitations—"

Mary smiled. She knew just how delighted the girls would be with such things.

"And I'd have the names of all graduates in the papers. And I'd have the girls dress in uniform—a pretty one, too—not only while they're in the school, but while they're on duty afterward. That would do away with the slatternly gowns. And I'd have certain specified hours for work, so as to give them time for the real living—"

"Poor Vinnie used to long so for that," said Mary, with tears in her eyes.

"And an authorized scale of wages. And I'd—oh, above all things, I'd cultivate a sentiment of self-respect among the girls. And unity, too. I'd organize them into a Society with a Constitution and meetings and rules and badges and a society pin. And I'd publish a special magazine for them, and make them proud of their profession. Only I'd have them do it all themselves, or at least I'd make them think they were doing it all."

"But what about the other girls—the ones that are doing housework now? Wouldn't you be throwing them out?"

"Oh, no. I've thought of that. They'd feel the pressure, of course, but it would be good for them. They would have to seek better preparation, too. Don't you know how wonderfully the standard of nursing has come up, by a process exactly similar?"

"Oh, Sister, Sister!" cried Mary. "It's beautiful! Why don't you do it?"

"I could, Mary—I'm perfectly sure of it. I just dream over it sometimes, and get so wrought up that I almost explode with my longing. But I can't—not

yet at least. It's money, Mary—just filthy lucre, or rather the lack of it. I haven't a cent, you know, and I can't even begin without money—a good deal of it, too. You see rich people, society people—they must be reached as well as the girls. For they are the ones who must give the girls employment, after they are trained—at least at first. So whoever begins must do it in a way that will command their following."

"I see," said Mary, a little sadly.

"But dear, dear! What am I thinking about. You bewitched me, Mary, to get me to talking like this. You're not strong enough to hear all my imaginings—your cheeks are as red as roses — let me take your temperature. If your fever has returned, I can never forgive myself. I indulge myself with these day-dreams, and when the Lord gets ready to send me the money—and I can't help but think He will sometime —I'll make them real. But in the meantime I do the 'next thyng.' Now you lie down and get rested, and I'll go and get your dinner. That's the next thing just now. No, not a word, dear."

Sister Elizabeth had other work, now that Mary did not require all her time, and there was not much chance for serious talk. The next day she carried up Mary's supper and arranged it before her, chatting cheerfully. Then she ran down in great glee to the Home dining-room for her own tea.

"Oh, girls!" she cried. "Great news! My Mary has laughed, actually laughed out loud! It was those blessed old conundrums that did it, silly as they are. I mean to keep a special stock of them on hand after this along with my quinine and paregoric. I was buttering her biscuit for her and I happened to ask her

why it was like a chrysalis. I told her about the butter—fly, and she smiled. Then I asked her if she knew why a mouse is like a haystack, and at the mention of 'cat'll' she laughed quite out loud. She's beautiful!"

"All your girls are beautiful," laughed her right-hand neighbor.

"But Mary is really remarkable," insisted Elizabeth. "If you knew her as well as I do you'd say so, too. A sweeter girl never lived."

"You'd love her all the same if she was utterly repulsive to every other soul on earth. It's your gift, Bessie, to love folks."

A deaconess across the table looked up with interest.

"What is your patient's last name?" asked she. "You always call her just Mary."

"Mary North."

The superintendent of the Home, a lady gray-haired, but with a fresh young face, repeated the name with some surprise.

"Mary North? Why, I thought—come to the office a moment after tea, please, Elizabeth."

They rose soon and Sister Elizabeth followed her superior to the little office.

"I thought her name was South," said the older lady.

"It was—that is—she didn't really say her name was Mary South—I don't believe she could tell a real lie—but I remember the exact words she used. 'Folks call me Mary South.' But she's told me all about it. She never planned to do it—change her name—but she was trying to get away from that man. And when she went to Smith and Smiths' to get work they asked

her suddenly what her name was, and it flashed upon her that he'd be sure to find her if she gave her right name. She hadn't a second to think—the man was waiting—and she was afraid she'd lose the place. Then it came over her how different everything was—her life so changed—different as south is from north—and she said "South." She was so young, and so frightened! Don't you think she was excusable?"

The elder lady stood absorbed in thought. "Mary North"—where had she heard the name? She turned, took down from a shelf above her head a large indexed book and opened it at "N."

"Why, it's Dr. Bayard's girl," said the superintendent. "Look here! Dr. Stephen Bayard—his uncle's ward! How glad I am! Telephone down to the dispensary at once."

"Stephen—Stephen Bayard? Mary talked about a Stephen in her delirium. It must be the same one," said the deaconess. She flew to the telephone.

In half an hour Stephen was at the Home, his face rigid with white anxiety. He had followed many clues—in vain. But a minute with the deaconess satisfied him that his long quest was at an end. A few words gave him the main facts of Mary's recent history.

"Can I see her, Sister?" said he with trembling voice.

"Of course you can, doctor. It will be a little shock, but she's quite well enough now for a pleasant surprise—only I think I'd better prepare her. Come up to the door—I will leave it open—and you will know when to come in. After she once knows you are here, the sooner over the better."

They went upstairs and the deaconess entered Mary's room.

"Mary, dear," said she. "I've some news for you. Good news—don't be frightened. It's about your friend, Dr. Bayard. He has been looking for you a long time, and now—"

"Stephen!" gasped Mary, her face whitening.

"Yes. Dr. Stephen Bayard. He's here, and wants to see you."

"Oh, I can't—I can't!" cried Mary. "Oh! Must he know?"

"He knows already. But he shall speak for himself. Here he is now." Mary's agony of suspense had better be ended at all costs.

"Oh, Sister, Sister!"

But Stephen was at her side and the nurse had fled, sobbing with sympathy, from the room.

"Mary!" exclaimed Stephen huskily. He took both her hands and held them close in his. The tears were in his eyes. "Poor child! Poor little girl!" He saw how changed she was and stopped, choking.

"Oh, Stephen, don't!" She tried to draw away her hands. "You mustn't! You don't know! I—I—I can't tell you. A dreadful thing has happened to me, Stephen."

"I know—I know all. But you were not to blame, dear child."

Mary turned a vivid crimson and dropped her head. The man at her side was moved with intense compassion for the smitten creature. His very heart seemed drawn out of his body in an agony of yearning over her, as if it would leap forth and enwrap and protect her forever!

"Mary! Mary!" cried he, brokenly. "Don't—don't, little Wood-violet! Don't look so! I can't bear it! I was to blame! Oh, why did I ever go away and leave you!"

But still she could not speak nor look at him. The blood had left her face again, and it was white as death. It seemed as if the shame would kill her.

"Mary! Mary!" again cried Stephen, in agony. Oh, what should he do!

Then a sudden thought came to him—an inspiration.

"A dreadful thing has happened to me, too," said he. "Look!"

He turned his face and lifted the hair at one side. Mary, startled into looking up, saw a red scar all along the white temple.

"A man tried to kill me."

"Oh, oh!" said she pitifully. "But that will get well. Mine—mine—oh, Stephen, you can't know the worst."

"Mary, I do know. It was that same man, Sloan, who shot me—in Boston—while I was looking for you."

"Who?" She stared at him bewildered.

"Sloan! Le Cygne!"

He lifted his hair again. Mary gazed at the scar as if fascinated.

"Let me tell you about it, Mary, and you will understand better how I—how I feel. When I got the cable—in Germany—the doctor cabled me when he could not find you—"

Mary made a little gesture of remonstrance.

"I came home on the first steamer. I put detectives on the track of that man, and when they found him—

it was then that he tried to kill me. He was a dangerous man, Mary. The officers were after him for murder at the very time I found him. But God has taken the case into His own hands, Mary. He is dead. He killed himself in trying to escape arrest."

"Dead?" gasped Mary.

"Yes," said Stephen, watching her intently.

A look of unmistakable relief came over Mary's face. Now she could resume her own name with safety. It was her first thought.

Stephen drew a long breath. Surely she never loved the man if she could hear of his death with a face like that.

"Then I came to Chicago. We thought you were here, because your letter was sent from Chicago. I've been trying to find you all this time, Mary—"

"I'm sorry I made so much trouble."

"And now I've found you! I've found you, Mary, and you shall never suffer again if I can help it."

"Oh, Stephen! I'm not worth it," said Mary brokenly.

"When you say that, Mary, you don't trust me."

"Trust you? Why, Stephen!"

"I am better able to judge of your value than you are yourself just now. Listen, Mary. You've been sick—sorely wounded in mind and body. And you're far from well, even now. You must let others think for you awhile. Now, dear, trust me. Don't be afraid to believe what I say. Let me judge for you. Will you?"

"I will try,' said Mary, with such humility in her tone that Stephen suddenly choked again. He sat, looking at her, speechless. A mighty impulse was upon

him to gather the frail little form up into his strong, sheltering arms. But no, it was too soon. It would only confuse and distress her the more. He must wait.

"Mary," said he, as soon as he could speak, "dear Mary, my judgment is that you are still just the same true, pure little girl that you were in Westland that happy summer when we were together — don't you remember? Just the same! This which has come to you has been hard to bear—"

"Oh! it's not that, but—"

"*My* wound was hard, too. I lay at death's door for days. And the pain! Ugh! I don't like to think of it. I'm not going to think of it."

"No, don't," said Mary in a tone of deepest pity. Her lips quivered as she thought that his wound was for her.

There was silence for a little while. Then Stephen spoke.

"I remember once when I was a little boy I was running along the street on some errand and, turning half around to look at a dog, I bumped my head terribly against the lamp-post. Mother was telling father about it that evening. 'Stevie has come into *collision* with a lamp-post,' said she. It was the first time I had ever noticed the word. It's so with us, Mary—both of us. We have come into collision with sin. But it hasn't quite killed us — and it's over now—past and gone forever. Why shouldn't we put the very memory of it out of our minds? It wouldn't have been wise for me to go on all my life worrying about the lamp-post?"

He paused. Mary was looking fixedly at him.

"Do you think anybody will think the less of me for my scar?" he continued. "Do *you* think less of me?"

"Oh, no, no! But—"

"No more in your case. There, Mary, don't let's talk of it any more, nor even think of it. When the temptation comes to you to brood over it, I want you to resolutely say to yourself, 'It's just a dreadful scar. It is all past and gone now.' Mary dear, let us go back to the old happy life again. Will you try? Do try! I am going to take you home to Westland as soon as you are able to travel."

"Home? Oh, Stephen!"

"Yes, home. How happy the doctor will be!"

CHAPTER XVIII

AT WESTLAND AGAIN

"They're comin' at last, an' no mistake!" announced Melissa from her post at the sitting-room window. It was half past one, Thanksgiving Day.

"Are they with him?" asked the doctor, getting slowly up from his big chair to see for himself.

"Yes, there's three of 'em." She wiped her eyes. "Well, I'll jest get the dinner on the table. They'll be hungry."

She glanced apprehensively at the doctor. "I'm afraid it'll kill him," said she to herself. "But I can't help it a mite, so I'll jest go on gettin' the dinner onto the table."

The doctor watched the sleigh drive up till it passed from his sight around by the door. Then he went heavily back to his chair, which he now seldom left. His face was working, his lips moving with, "Thank God! Thank God!"

Pretty soon he knew that Stephen and Ira were helping Mary into the house. He heard exclamations of welcome from Melissa, and kisses and sobs from his wife. Then Ira drove old Fan to the stable, and Stephen was at the door stamping the light snow from his shoes. The doctor's heart began to beat heavily. He felt it, and recognized it instinctively as a dangerous symptom for a man in his condition. But it was only in a secondary kind of way—his

thoughts were primarily intent on the joyful tumult outside. That was important—this other, trivial.

"I mustn't die just now," he thought to himself, still in the secondary incidental way. "She'd think she was to blame for it though I died of pure joy. And she'd feel bad. She's had sorrow enough—I mustn't—not now."

So he sat very still and tried to be calm. His heart became more quiet.

Then *she* came through the door—alone. Her dear face was just the same, only a little thinner, and with a sweet chastened look upon it that had never been there before. Her glorious eyes were shining with their violet light, her cheeks were pink with excitement, her beautiful sweet lips were quivering. She hesitated a moment. Then the yearning arms opened toward her, a thousand welcomes leaped up into the dear old face, and she ran to his side. She tried to kneel before him, but he drew her up to his lap, crooning father words of love and welcome such as she had never before dreamed of. He kissed her again and again, and the tears glistened down into his white beard. She heard him whisper, "Precious daughter!"

"Oh, Uncle Doctor! Can you ever forgive me? I did not think it would grieve you so."

"Hush, my girl! Forgive me for not taking better care of you. I can never forgive myself!"

"Why, uncle—I—"

But Melissa came bustling in, her anxiety too great for further restraint.

"Now, Mary," said she, in the most commonplace way in the world. "You must get your things right off and come to dinner. No, you ain't goin' to tire

yourself all out by climbin' those stairs to your room before dinner. Come into the spare room—I fetched some water a purpose for you. There! Now be as quick you can, dear, without hurryin' yourself. My dinner's gettin' cold, an' it's Thanksgiving Day, you know."

They gathered around the table, the doctor in his big chair at the head. He would have Stephen at his left hand and Mary at his right. Melissa and Ira came next. Mrs. Sheldon, dazed a little but very happy, sat at the other end with her best silver coffee service before her. The urn steamed fragrant odors and the creamer was yellow with its rich contents. "Grace" was a difficult matter, but the doctor choked out a few familiar words. Then he pushed the great brown bird over to Stephen to carve.

"My! What a beauty!" said Stephen. "And so big! No wonder you can't manage it, Uncle Joshua."

"Ira bought it," said the doctor. "He's a pretty good judge of turkeys."

"It must weigh twelve pounds," said Stephen, sharpening his carving knife.

They were all so glad to find some safe, pleasant thing to talk about.

"Fifteen poun' an' a leetle over," said Ira. "Sam Snyder said 'twas the choicest bird of his flock, an' I guess 'twas. Sam raises pretty good turkeys." The little man beamed on turkey and Stephen alike, and would have beamed on himself if he could, with modest self-approval.

"Fifteen pounds! That's just two pounds and a half apiece for us," said Stephen. "And I shall claim the 'little over' for myself, because I'm doing the carving."

So Stephen piled the plates and Mrs. Sheldon served the coffee and poured in the cream till the cups ran over; and Melissa performed the most important function of all—she waited on the table. And they ate their Thanksgiving dinner with grateful joy.

Stephen and Mary stayed on at the doctor's quiet home till after Christmas without much planning for the future. Then Stephen decided to go back to his dispensary and his work among the poor. But Mary, noting the growing feebleness of the doctor and his wife, felt that her place was with them.

"But you will let me know the moment I can be of any service to you, won't you?" said Stephen. "I'm only twenty-four hours away, you know. And I'm coming in June anyway. Promise me that you'll telegraph if you want me."

"You've done so much for me already," said Mary, with tears in her eyes.

"Oh, Mary, don't you see—" said he. But Mary's face was utterly void of comprehension. Stephen's heart closed in upon itself in a cramp of fierce hatred of the dead man. That wretch—that unspeakable villain! Had he exhausted Mary's resources for loving? Would her heart never waken toward himself? How long must he wait?

The next day he left for the West.

The doctor lingered till summer, seeming to draw his very life from Mary's presence. For his sake she strove to forget her sad past and grew every day brighter and happier—like her old self, only sweeter and more loving. The doctor called her always "daughter," and she gladly responded with "father." Mental decay was fast falling upon Mrs. Sheldon, but

the doctor's mind brightened as his body failed. His whole nature seemed to mellow and soften. He even forsook the stately forms in which his prayers had been wont to be cast, and talked with God with the simplicity and trustfulness of a little child.

"He's a-ripenin' for Heaven fast," said Melissa, wiping her eyes with the corner of her apron. Ira and Mary saw it, too. Mrs. Sheldon was the only one peacefully unaware of the coming change.

Letters came from Stephen almost every day. His work was intensely interesting, he wrote, but he was looking forward to June.

One day, just after reading one of his letters, Mary was alone with the doctor, sitting by his side.

"Daughter," said he, taking her face in his two gentle old hands and bringing it close to his near-sighted eyes. "Daughter, I want to tell you something—something that makes me very happy."

"What is it, father?"

"I used to wonder sometimes who would take care of you when I am gone. But I know now. It's—it's Stephen!"

"Stephen? Oh, father! Surely not Stephen!"

"Yes, daughter. Why not? Anyone but you would have seen long ago that—"

Mary sprang to her feet.

"Oh, but—did he tell you himself?"

"No, Mary, but we all see it."

"Father! Father!" she cried, vehemently. "You must stop it. It must not be." She turned abruptly and fled from the room.

The doctor gazed after her anxiously. "I've said enough, I guess," he said to himself. "Of course

she'd think of—*that*—poor child! I'm glad he's dead. She's fond of Stephen—how she blushed! Well, if he can't win her now, I miss my guess."

He smiled contentedly as he thought that Stephen usually brought things to pass. Then he fell into a happy day-dream.

Upstairs in her little room Mary drank her cup of pain. Stephen's wife! Never! The doctor must be mistaken. But if he was not? Well, whatever passing regard Stephen might have for her would vanish as soon as he knew that it was hopeless. And it *was* hopeless. Why, he could marry anybody! God helping her he should never mar his career by marrying a woman like herself. She would make him understand without words if she could, but if worst came to worst she would tell him plainly. And nothing he could say should ever change it. As for her—her future?—Well, never mind!

The doctor tried several times to renew the subject, but Mary evaded it. So the good man was left to comfort himself as best he could, trusting Stephen's prowess for the future.

With the pleasant days of June, Stephen came, a little worn with intense life in one of the most crowded downtown sections of a great city, but carefree and happy as Mary had never seen him. He had shaved off his beard, leaving only moustaches, and looked to Mary no longer as old as the doctor. He greeted Mary with the usual tender solicitude. She tried hard to be natural, but found it very difficult. Every casual word from him brought the color flying to her face. She was constrained and distant, and took good care never for a moment to be alone with him.

"Why, Mary! What's the matter?" Stephen would say sometimes at first, missing the quick response or look of sympathy. And she would reply, "Nothing," trying to look him in the eye with the old simple frankness. It cut her to the heart that he might think her growing ungrateful—forgetting so soon all his kindness. But she chose that rather than the other. What mattered it after all, what he thought of her?

The doctor seemed to rally for a while, and he and Stephen renewed their long pleasant talks—the chats about books, discussions of medical subjects, incidents of the dispensary work. And another subject was at last broached, from the discussion of which Stephen carried away a lighter heart and a better courage.

But in July the old man began again to fail. He still would be helped out into the orchard on sunny afternoons, to sit in the armchair that Mary would arrange for him in the midst of the beehives. Then she would kiss him and leave him for a visit with his winged friends. And there they found him one day, the sunlight through the trees glancing over him, his eyes closed as if in slumber, a smile on his face. The breeze was lifting his white locks gently, and the friendly bees were buzzing about him, but his spirit had fled. Mrs. Sheldon heard the news with a peaceful smile. She had passed beyond any understanding of her loss, and a few days later she, too, was laid to rest beside her husband.

By the doctor's will Stephen was made sole executor, but he received no interest in the estate, save only the doctor's library and surgical instruments, and a

personal memento or two. Ira and Melissa, "my true and faithful helpers and friends through many years," were each given annuities quite sufficient for their simple needs. But all of the property, the small farm and house and about $32,000 in securities and government bonds, went direct to "my beloved daughter and ward, Mary North." It was conditioned only by the annuity to Ira and Melissa, and the care of Mrs. Sheldon as long as she lived. Nobody was surprised at the will but Mary herself.

The girl was sorely afflicted by the death of her old friends. That she had known it was coming helped her not at all. One is never ready for death. She did not break down in violent weeping, but her pale face and the hopelessness of the droop about the sweet lips, told the story of wakeful nights and silent tears. Rayless darkness seemed again to have closed about her. Once Stephen could have helped her, but now she nerved herself every morning for a possible encounter with him. She avoided him persistently. Then one morning she failed to come down to breakfast. Melissa, visiting her room with a tray of food and a letter that Ira had just brought, reported to Stephen, waiting anxiously below, that Mary said she was only tired, not sick. She needed no medicine—would be down to dinner.

Stephen resolved with set lips that not another day should pass without his telling her all his heart. He would force an interview. But for the present moment he was very anxious. He feared serious illness, or a recurrence of the morbid depression of the months before. Then he feared—this most of all, notwithstanding the doctor's hopefulness—that it was his

presence that distressed and embarrassed her. She knew he loved her—the doctor had told her—was it distasteful to her? Well, he would know. And that before the set of another sun. He settled himself for a grim waiting.

CHAPTER XIX

MAN PURPOSES, BUT—

Two hours slipped by. Suddenly Stephen's quick ear caught the sound of a little stir in the room above —Mary's room. Then a door opened and closed and Mary's step was on the stairs. Yet—was it Mary's? This step had not the languid sound of yesterday. It was firm, elastic, full of directness. Stephen felt the difference. What could it mean? His heart leaped into his throat as he rose to meet the girl. She wore, not the light morning gown in which he had so often seen her lately, but a street dress of dark stuff; and her face, though its pallor was marked and the eyes were reddened with weeping, was bright with strength and purpose.

"Good morning," said she, walking directly to him and giving him her hand with a serious smile.

"Good morning," responded Stephen. "I hope—I hope you slept well." Her new frankness embarrassed him. "Now you must have breakfast."

"Oh, I've had my breakfast—upstairs. Melissa brought it to me."

"Are you better this morning?"

"Yes, I'm quite well."

"Mary, I—" He would begin at once. "I want to talk with you. Won't you give me a little time?"

"Yes, I'll be glad to do so," was the unexpected

reply. "I want to talk with you, too. I have a letter from Sadie. Will you read it?"

Stephen silently read the letter.

DEAR MARY:—I take my pen in hand to answer your letter. We are all well, and hope these few lines will find you the same. The weather is deadly hot, and we are not very busy at the store. I am sorry to have to tell you some bad news. It's about Vinnie. I wouldn't ever have told you, for I know you thought so much of her, but she made me promise solemn that I'd tell you, so I have to. She is dead. She drank carbolic acid and she died, but not right off. She lived sixteen hours. She sent for me, and I went to see her. She wanted me to find you, and cried very hard when I told her you had gone home and that you couldn't get here in time. She looked like herself, so pretty, only her chin was terribly burned, for the acid ran down on her chin when she swallowed it. She was in a blue silk dress yet, for they could not get it off, and there were lots of roses and flowers in the room, and she had her maid and two doctors and they done all they could, but she died. She screamed terribly and prayed. She told me to tell you that she was sorry she done it, but she said after all, the poison was the best. She sent you her love, and said you were the best friend she ever had. And she wanted me to tell you very special that she was sorry she hadn't gone with you, even if it was to do housework. And she wished you'd do something if you could to help the other girls, like you tried to help her. She made me promise special, that I'd tell you that. Ma and I and Evvie have been talking about it a great deal, and it seems to us that the girls might do housework if someone would only talk to them about it, and then begin and teach them how, and we want to try and do something to get them started, for there's two more gone that way lately. There surely ain't anything else but housework. One was at the linings counter, and Evvie knew her. She was a very nice girl and an orphan. Evvie thinks she'd like to try herself, for she's deathly tired of linings, and I could stay in the store and talk to the girls if there was some kind of a place where they could go and learn and be happy while they was learning. And we thought we'd write you. I feel very bad about so many of the girls, and maybe the Lord will help you to think of something. Now, don't feel bad about Vinnie, for I'm sure she's better off, for

she was so sorry, and prayed. Ma and Evvie and I went to the funeral, and there were so many girls there from those houses, and they cried dreadful, and not one of them looked as old as Evvie, and she ain't twenty yet. So please don't feel bad about her, and if you can think of anything we will do it.

Ma and Evvie and Bess sends you their best love, and hope you are real well. So no more for this time. Write soon.

Your loving friend,

SARAH A. SPENCER.

Stephen gave the letter back to Mary. They were silent. He wondered at her calmness. He knew how she had loved Vinnie—how could she bear this as she did! He had forgotten that she had gone through the death sorrow once over her friend. Now, even though she could not shut out of her vision the burned face of the dying girl writhing and shrieking in the midst of her silks and roses, yet it was a relief to know that she was at least out of her dreadful life. But the message she sent, "Do something for the other girls," had gone deep into Mary's heart. Coming just when it did, it was a strong salt breeze blowing in suddenly from the sea upon a traveler fainting with dry heat. It had transformed a timid, drifting girl into a thoroughly alive, purposeful woman. Stephen marveled at the change.

"I want to ask you some questions about my business," said Mary. "Will you tell me how my money —what the doctor left me—is invested?"

"I'm glad you want to know. Some of it is in government bonds, and some in western lands, secured by first mortgage."

"What will be—if it isn't too much trouble—"

"Certainly not. It is my duty as executor to answer any questions."

"What will be my income?"

"Let me see. I suppose the invested money averages about five per cent interest. That would make sixteen hundred dollars. Then there is your own place—your mother's house. I have succeeded in redeeming that for you."

"My place? My mother's house?"

"Yes, I finished the business yesterday, and have just been waiting to tell you. It was not difficult, only tedious. The property was secured under false pretences, you know. I would not trouble you about it till I was sure of success."

"I thought it was gone," said Mary, with tears in her eyes. "I don't know how to thank you for all you've done for me."

"Don't thank me, Mary, it's a pleasure."

"But what had I better do with the place?"

"You might keep on renting it, but I should advise selling. The rent is very little, and it would sell for about five thousand."

"And if that could be invested?"

"It would mean two hundred and fifty more of regular income. Then there is this place here. But I presume you will let Ira keep this on his annuity?"

"I want to take Ira and Melissa with me to—to Chicago."

"To Chicago?"

"Yes, I am going to Chicago."

He gazed at her too astonished to reply.

"I am going to carry out Vinnie's wish if I can, Stephen. I am going to rent a house and—" she hesitated.

"But—but—"

"I'm going to help Sister Elizabeth open a school for housework—in my own house. Surely one can do a great deal with eighteen hundred and fifty dollars every year. The girls would come to my school—in my house, I mean." And she told him of her talk with the deaconess on the subject.

Stephen's face clouded.

"I don't know," said he doubtfully. "It's a beautiful plan, of course, but—I'm afraid it's rather—visionary. There have been many vain attempts to make housework popular, Mary." He told her about the various schools for domestic servants in New York and other cities.

"But these are all to train women already doing housework, are they not?"

"Yes."

"And they did not arise among the girls themselves?"

"No."

"Well, they may be very good, but I don't think they'll ever touch the girls in stores and shops. Those girls must have something new—something among themselves and specially for them."

"But couldn't Sadie do it—if she had the money?"

"Sadie doesn't know the first thing about housework, but she can do almost anything with those girls. I think she can do most by staying right where she is."

Stephen sat with heavy brows. Must he be put aside for this fancy? It was good to see the light on her face, but might not—might not what he had been about to say bring it there, as well?

"I had hoped, Mary," he ventured—it was he now who was the timid one. "I had hoped—"

"I am sure this is the thing for me to do, Stephen," interrupted Mary again. Her cheeks were scarlet, but her voice was steady. "You will be in Chicago, too, and can help us in so many ways. We can be good friends, can't we? I must do this, Stephen. I have often wondered why my life was spared, but I know now."

She looked at him steadily, her eyes shining with lofty purpose, yet misty with unspoken entreaty. In all the varied circumstances in which Stephen had seen her he had never so admired and longed for her. His heart seemed breaking with its hungry yearning, but in the white, unselfish light of that face he dared not press his personal plans. He must wait. Well, then, he *would* wait. But he vowed to himself that it should be waiting only, not abandonment. His time to speak should come, if not for twenty years. At least he would be near her. He drew a long patient breath into his powerful lungs and softly breathed it out again. With it went all his immediate hopes.

"Of course I'll help you, Mary." His tone was full of frank friendliness. He would be generous about it. "Tell me more of your plan. Taking care of sick folks is very different from housework; it is really a serious thing. It requires special skill—you have life in your hands."

"I think taking care of well folks requires skill, too. Don't folks ever get sick by badly prepared food?"

"Half of them," said Stephen promptly. The physician in him had to admit it.

"And don't housewives sometimes break down nervously because they can't get competent help?"

"The air is full of it," said Stephen.

"And the deaconesses say that a great deal of sorrow among the poor might be saved if the mothers only knew how to cook better and make home pleasanter for their families."

"I don't quite see how your plan is going to help that."

"Oh, don't you? Most of the mothers among the poor are clerks or shop-girls before they are married. And, Stephen, it was not more than fifty or sixty years ago that it never entered anybody's head that 'special skill,' as you say, was required for nursing."

"Oh, don't bring my past up against me," cried Stephen, laughing. "I'm converted now. Or at least I'm in the throes of conversion."

"I won't," said Mary generously. "But think of 'Sairy Gamp,' ignorant, dishonest, superstitious—"

"Mrs. Van Drake would say you were describing the modern servant girl to a dot. She regaled me with a disquisition on the subject a half hour long the last time I called on her."

"I thought at first," said Mary, "after I got Sadie's letter, that I'd go to Chicago and start a boarding-house for the girls like Mrs. Turner's—only better and cheaper, with parlors and reading-rooms—a real home for the girls—"

"Cheaper, did you say?"

"It was so hard for the girls to pay even the two dollars and fifty cents a week, with all their other expenses."

"That is, you would help support them?"

"Well—yes. If you put it that way."

"Do you think the girls would like that?"

"No, I'm sure they wouldn't. I'd about given up

starting my boarding-house among them for that very reason."

"There's another difficulty, even greater. If living conditions at less expense should be made possible—for that is what it would amount to—who would eventually reap the benefit? For instance, at Smith and Smiths', or at the Steinloh Clothing Company?"

"Would it be the Steinloh Company?"

"It seems so to me. The company would simply reduce prices a little more, and the girls would accept the lower prices."

Mary drew a long breath. "It is difficult, isn't it?" said she.

"Very difficult. Don't you remember about the man who told his friends, at the end of a long life spent in helping all sorts of good enterprises, that he hoped he had done more good than harm by the money he had given away, but he was not sure? I haven't much experience, you know, but I believe that almost the only help we can give folks, except in sickness or emergency, is to help them to help themselves. But your school would be doing just that. It's better than the boarding-house idea."

"Oh, but we must have a boarding-house of some sort in connection with the school — that part of it came into my mind this morning — to furnish the practice you see. All the nurses' training schools are in connection with hospitals."

"Oh, I see—a kind of housework *clinic*. A very good idea! But the boarding-house would better be for the rich, I think. Your graduates will work for the rich."

"Well—maybe, at first. Sister thought so."

"But when could the girls study?"

"Oh, evenings, and odd minutes, the same as they do in the nurses' training schools. Then if the boarding-house feature is a success—"

"It will be, with Melissa back of it."

"The money made will help to pay the girls. They must have their board and a little money for clothes and books, you know, even while they're studying. Sister Elizabeth told me she was paid eight dollars a month all the time she was a pupil in the nurses' training school."

"Oh! I was wondering how you would give the girls a course in your school in such a way as to allow them to retain their independence and yet come out free from debt. It really sounds workable. But have you thought of the other side? Not many people, comparatively, among those who need help in their homes, could possibly pay their servants—"

"Oh, they mustn't be *servants*. That one word would spoil everything."

"Why, what's the matter with 'servants'? The president of the United States is the servant of the people."

"It may do for the president, but it wouldn't do for these girls. That's just what they don't want to be—servants."

"But what will you call them?"

"I don't know, but the word 'servant' or 'domestic' or even 'maid' mustn't come within a million miles of them. Trained—trained—trained nurses is just right for the nurses, but—do help me, Stephen."

"How would 'trained helpers' do?"

"I like that very much. 'Help' is a beautiful word.

Sister Elizabeth showed me in the Bible, once when I felt discouraged, that to be a *help* was enumerated among the special gifts of God, along with prophets and miracle-workers. I think 'trained helpers' is best."

"But, Mary, the money question. Not many people can afford to pay your—trained helpers—the wages a trained nurse can command."

"I know that, but Sister said that when a nurse remains in one place a long time—as our girls would, you know—and so does not have board or room rent to pay, she receives frequently only forty, or thirty, or even twenty-five dollars a month. There are great advantages in having steady employment."

Stephen acquiesced.

"Then the girls would save enough in any family to more than make up for their larger wages. They would be thoroughly trained in management and economy, you know, and in proper food combinations, and how to cook hygienically, and—oh, everything. But to start *is* going to be difficult. Sister says it must command the confidence of the rich as well as the poor from the very first. I want the great ladies —the leaders of society—to be standing in line quite out into the street to engage our first graduates!"

She laughed brightly at the picture. Stephen laughed, too. How changed she was! Looking at her wonderingly, he thought of some desert plant, some night-blooming cereus, that bursts in one glad day into masses of glorious brightness. Under the dominance of this mighty motive all the tremendous forces of Mary's rich and beautiful nature, long repressed, were bursting into marvelous, transforming bloom.

"Mary, you're a general!" exclaimed Stephen, with involuntary homage. "You're a genius—you and your deaconess! I believe you're going to solve the problem."

"Do you, *really*, Stephen?" The girl seemed suddenly surcharged with vital happiness.

"I do, really. It's worth trying it at any rate. And if the school is a success, others will spring up all over the country."

"Do you think the people will come to our boarding-house?"

"Your clinical material? Oh, I'll guarantee it. There are thousands of people who want just such a home. They'll pay good prices, too. The very idea of the thing will attract some—the world is crazy for new ideas. Your place will be self-supporting from the first."

"And do you think I'll have money enough? Sister Elizabeth hasn't any."

"Yes, I think—Mary, let me be your business manager," with a sudden thought. "That's the way I can help you most."

"Oh, will you?" Mary was happier than she had ever expected to be again.

CHAPTER XX

IRA "GITS IT OUT"

It was not an easy matter to secure Melissa's approval of Mary's plan, though she respectfully stopped her apple peeling at the table in the kitchen, and held her paring knife at "attention" when Mary came in to talk with her about it.

"Land o' livin' love, child," said she. "I couldn't run a city boardin'-house to save my soul. I can cook, to be sure — there ain't much I don't know about cookin' — an' mebby I've got a little faculty at turnin' off work. An' I can manage, but—"

"That's just what I want you to do, Melissa—manage. The work must be done by the girls, you know, under their teachers, but I must have some one —some one just like you to keep things straight. Some one who has it born in them to—"

"But bless you, I couldn't keep things straight in a city. I don't know nothin' about a city, Mary."

"Well, if you need special preparation—"

"Just what you're going to give the rest," said Stephen just behind her.

"We'd go—both of us—into a fashionable boarding-house for a few weeks. It's just the thing that I need, too."

"Gracious sakes alive, Mary! That wouldn't help any. An' I'd die with the fidgits, settin' round an' doin' nothin'. I'd go stark, ravin', distracted crazy!"

"Oh, I didn't mean to do nothing, Melissa — we'd work. We'd go right into the kitchen—Sister Elizabeth would get places for us. You could be cook and I chambermaid. We'd learn fast that way."

But Melissa plainly thought the girl was losing her senses.

Mary saw the utter hopelessness of mere argument. It unsealed her lips and she poured into Melissa's shocked ears the story of poor Vinnie. Melissa had heard before only the barest outlines of the history of Mary's sad year, but not even a mention of her friend.

"There, Melissa! It's to try to save these dear girls that we're going to open the school. It's not a wild plan—the deaconess thought it all out, and even Stephen approves of it. And Vinnie has sent us a message from her grave—the letter you brought me this morning. Let me read it to you."

She read the letter aloud with shaking voice, and Melissa's eyes ran over with pitying tears.

"Poor dear! Poor dear!" ejaculated the good woman, as Mary ceased. "Poor motherless lambie!" Then turning fiercely on Mary—she must be fierce toward somebody—she cried out, "Yes, I'll go! Yes, yes, yes! If I can do anything in the world to help save the poor things, I'll do it!"

She had been standing all this time. Now she threw herself into a chair and, taking into her lap the great pan of apples, she began again to pare them, the tears streaming over her cheeks.

"Land o' livin' love!" she exclaimed. "What a baby I be! But I'm all unstrung."

Suddenly she caught sight of Ira, an astonished but silent listener to everything.

"If Irey'll go, too," said she involuntarily. Then she checked herself in horror, and her face and neck turned a slow fiery red. She looked down at her pan and the keen little paring knife fairly flew through the red and white June apples.

"Oh, Ira must go, of course," said Mary. "We can't get along at all without him."

"Ira would be invaluable about such an institution," said Stephen.

"I can't go," said Ira slowly, "nor I can't stay, now that the old folks are gone. I can't go—unless—"

There was a speaking silence.

Ira at last got up, in a horrible awkwardness but in a desperate resolution, and took a tentative step toward the red Melissa.

"Oh, Lissie!—" said he. But though for the first time in her life Melissa failed with her prompt interruption, her little lover could not for the life of him get out another word.

They stood, all four, in an impromptu tableau—Mary blushing, too, from keen sympathy, Ira looking ready to fall to pieces with embarrassment, as they say certain kinds of starfish are liable to do if excited. There was not a motion but the swifter and swifter flash of Melissa's knife. At last the man turned, a drooping figure of utter dejection, and shuffled toward the back door. He opened it and passed out. He did not close it behind him though, and he paused irresolutely on the first step.

"Pardon me, Melissa," said Stephen inside, in a very gentle tone. "Pardon me, but Ira is a splendid fellow. When a true man like that proposes marriage to a woman—"

"Proposes!" snapped Melissa, her self-control quite giving way, "he never proposed to me in all his born days!"

Ira, outside, heard every word. He caught his breath. Never proposed! Was it possible she didn't know that he was eating his heart out for love of her? Well, then, he would formally *propose*. Stephen and Mary were still there in the kitchen he supposed. Well, let all creation be there—it should not stop him.

He walked back into the room and straight to the woman paring apples with twitching fingers. His knees were shaking under him. He could have walked full into the face of a wild bull with less call for "nerve," but he did not flinch. Melissa was looking steadily at her work.

"Maylissie," stammered he. "I po—I po—"

He felt that something was wrong, paused a moment, then began again loudly and desperately.

"Maylissie, I po-pose!"

There was a dead silence save for the venomous little hiss of the knife as it went through the apple skins. The perspiration stood in great drops on Ira's forehead as he saw his blunder. He began again with tragic slowness. The "r" should go in this time.

"Maylissie, I pro-prose!"

This was too much for the poor woman. The decision to follow Mary which she had just made, was pulling strongly at her nerves, and now to have *this* come on top of everything! And before folks, too! She suddenly threw up her hands and burst into screams of hysterical merriment. The pan slid from her lap and fell to the floor with a terrific clatter, and the apples bumped and rolled about in every direction. Still

clutching her knife, Melissa laughed till the tears again rolled down her cheeks.

Ira stood by quietly. His face was very white, but the outburst of ridicule—for so it seemed to him—had, strangely enough, entirely restored his self-control. The very fact that his case was *in extremis* gave him calmness and dignity.

"All right, Lissie," said he. "That means I'm to go. I've been thinkin' it 'ud come to this. I'm hard hit, but I ain't complainin'. The world is big an' I'll jes' go away where the sight of me won't be a-worryin' you any more. I won't trouble to git my things upstairs—they ain't worth much, an' you can jes' give 'em to the next tramp that comes along."

He turned and came toward Mary and Stephen, extending his hand.

"Why, Ira!" gasped Mary. "You mustn't go this way. We can't spare you at all. And it's your home, Ira, as much as it is mine. You mustn't—"

She stopped short. There was something in his face that made it impossible for her to go on. A lump rose in her throat.

"You'll find my accounts all straight in the big blank book in the doctor's old desk," said Ira. "An' if ever you want to see me on any business matters Lawyer Jones'll always know where I am. It *is* rather sudden, but you'll haf to excuse me. Stephen'll help you out all right. Good-bye."

Mary shook hands with starting tears. She thought Melissa very cruel. Stephen, too, shook hands warmly, proffering all sorts of friendly help.

Last of all, Ira walked over to Melissa. She had risen, her knife still clutched firmly with the point out

as if she intended to stab someone. Her tall figure towered above the wreck of her apples, her breath came and went in gasps, her color changed from red to white.

"Good-bye, Maylissie," said Ira shakily.

He held out his hand as near the knife-point as seemed safe, but Melissa did not take it. She stood staring at him a moment as if she could not believe her eyes. Then she suddenly burst into a great flood of genuine weeping, dropped her knife and threw her long arms about his neck. She almost gathered him up in her embrace.

"Oh, Irey! Don't go!" she sobbed. "I didn't mean it. I can't live without you."

Ira's arms went round Melissa's waist without a particle of hesitation. But he asked almost sternly, "Will you marry me, Lissie? Right off?"

The reply was lost in Ira's coat collar. Then Mary saw him deliberately lift Melissa's face and kiss her on the lips. They had evidently forgotten all about her, and she fled to the sitting-room, laughing and crying all at once. Stephen, too, had disappeared—where, no one knew. Mary was glad he had not followed her.

After a while Melissa picked up her apples and went to getting dinner, and Ira went to his work in the garden. But he used the Marconi system with entire success every one of the twenty-three times that Melissa in her work just happened to pass the back window that day.

"Lissie, darlin', why did you keep me waitin' all these years?" asked he that evening, as they sat together on the porch. The moonlight flooded a part of the place, but they had chosen seats in the shade.

"I don't know, Irey," replied Melissa, penitent. "I didn't want to do it, but I jes' seemed to haf to. I thought at first you'd urge a little, an' I guess I was provoked because you didn't. Mebbe I wanted to see if you'd ever *git it out!* I hope you'll forgive me."

There was a certain sound in the dim corner and a silence made necessary by the fact that there were no lips available for speaking purposes. Pretty soon Ira said, "Make it to-morrow, Lissie."

"To-morrow! Oh, I—"

But again there was the necessitated silence.

CHAPTER XXI

THE HEALING OF THE SCAR

Three years had passed and the "School for Trained Helpers" was on a firm basis. The first class had just graduated with Evvie Spencer as valedictorian—Sadie was still at Smith and Smiths', forelady now of the cloak department. The great public had taken up the school enthusiastically; the girls themselves were happily confident of success. All the graduates had been promptly engaged in representative families. They said of themselves, with dignified self-respect, that they were "on duty." Trained helpers never "hire out."

A very important adjunct of the school was the large boarding-house in the management of which Melissa and Ira were factors of untold value. Other helpers had gathered about the enterprise. Sister Elizabeth, of course, gave her entire time to it with Mary, and two of the best teachers in practical work were women of the helpful Deaconess Order. Moreover, a lady trained by long service in the public schools had been drawn into the work. This lady, Miss St. John, was exceedingly bright and efficient, and a warm friendship soon sprang up between her and Mary. Stephen still kept the general management of his dispensary, and his name was becoming known not only as a philanthropist but as a physician; but never a day passed that he was not at the school, which, indeed, would have fared badly without his help. It was he who had

rented and beautifully furnished the large house used by the institution, without calling at all on Mary's smaller resources. It was he, the only one of them all, who was making friends for the school by carrying it into social life. "Society" had opened its arms wide to the wealthy bachelor with the reputation for philanthropy and eccentricity. And Stephen was making good use of his friends. The Hotel de l'Europe, one of the finest and most exclusive in the city, was seriously considering the question of inviting the school to take charge of its *cuisine*.

"We can do it," declared Sister Elizabeth, joyfully. "We'll just establish an Annex. Oh, the time will come when every hotel and boarding-house in the land will have a branch of the School for Trained Helpers. We are on the verge of a revolution in kitchen and household management—an evolution rather."

Mary herself had responded marvelously to the heavy demands of her new life. Her resources seemed limitless and her mental development was noticeable even to herself. "I expected once to go to Vassar," she said to Miss St. John, "but this is doing more for me than any college could do."

In the midst of the terrible toil she was more nearly happy than she had ever again expected to be; but her moments of relaxation from intense occupation were always moments of torture. Sometimes in her sleep even, the fearful past would roll upon her, and she would spring from her bed in breathless terror, struggling in the ghoulish grasp of the horrible hand. She never spoke of it. He knows womankind but superficially who has not learned that secrets may find their deepest grave in her steadfast heart.

Stephen's attitude toward Mary had been one of careful restraint and courtesy, quite like the old time friendliness. Mary was simply grateful at first; then in her humility she began to misunderstand him. Watching his calm demeanor, feeling his frank brotherliness, she began to think that Doctor Sheldon must have been mistaken—that she herself must have put a wrong construction on that which had doubtless been nothing more than the tender and generous friendship of a good man for an unfortunate girl. She tried to be greatly relieved at this conclusion—it was just what she was sure she desired. He would marry, of course—he frequently spoke admiringly of the lovely women he met. Mary assured herself that it would make her very happy. Then she turned more eagerly than ever to her work, burying herself in its minutest details.

But as the years passed the labor and the pain began to tell deeply on Mary's health. Stephen, watchful, suggested vacations, but was quietly repelled. A vacation—cessation of work—was the last thing Mary desired. But the reaction from the excitement of the first Commencement was so marked in the girl's haggard face and feeble step that Stephen in great alarm began to insist on a change for her. Then Sister Elizabeth and Melissa began to urge it, and finally Miss St. John. One day as Mary sat at her desk Stephen knocked at her office door and straightway began on the unwelcome subject.

"But you *must* go, Mary. You are simply killing yourself, don't you see?"

Just then Miss St. John came in with some papers, her fine face full of animation—the very type of beautiful womanhood.

"Tell Miss North she must go away for a good long rest," pleaded Stephen.

There was an interchange of significant looks, a flash of understanding with the words. Mary caught it. Her heart gave one great shock as the meaning of it came to her, then seemed to stop altogether, and the room darkened about her. So it was to be Miss St. John—strange she had never thought of her. But Miss St. John was her very best friend—how glad she was! Yet she sat swaying, clutching the edge of the desk, fighting the faintness.

"What's the matter, Mary?" cried Stephen, his voice cutting sharply through her dulling senses. The sound of it recalled her to herself. Oh, they must never know! With a mighty effort her heart began again to beat, and she looked up with a pale smile.

Nothing at all, she declared. No, she would not take a vacation. She did not need it, and she could not be spared—talking rather incoherently. It was Miss St. John who needed the vacation—let her go.

Stephen in desperate anxiety went to Melissa, and the next morning that good woman, frightened but determined, came to Mary with two many-couponed railroad tickets in her hand. They were for Westland.

Mary looked up in dull alarm. Were her two faithful old friends going to leave her? But Melissa hastened to explain.

"No, no, Mary, they ain't for us—leastways not for Irey. Wild oxen couldn't drag him away till those pesterin' men git that new heatin' plant in order, an' that'll take all summer. They're for you an' me. We're goin' to Westland this afternoon on the three

o'clock train. Now don't you say no, with these tickets all bought. I'm plum crazy to see the old place again; an' Mis' Daly, she takes summer boarders, you know. Stephen an' Sister an' Miss St. John—we all know all about it, Mary." She raised her voice. "Miss St. John?"

Miss St. John came at the call, followed closely by Stephen—how inseparable they were! They upheld Melissa with argument and entreaty.

"Here are the sleeping-car tickets," said Stephen. "It's a conspiracy against you, Mary. Do go!"

Well, if *he* desired it she would go. Perhaps it would be pleasanter for him, just now—for him and Miss St. John—if she were quite out of the way.

Mrs. Daly welcomed them back to the old home—she was the wife of the thrifty farmer who had rented the place. Mary lay down on her own bed in her own little room. She was tired and out of heart, almost to dying. The crowding memories bewildered and benumbed her. For days she could not sleep, and she could not think except in the old circles of fire. Melissa, greatly troubled, brought her food and wept over her, but even her old friend's tears hardly roused her. But at last one night, with the sweet wind blowing full upon her face through the morning-glory vines, she slept. She woke in the fragrant morning and a little stir of life was in her veins.

Melissa stole into the room with her breakfast tray, her lips trembling with great news. But Mary lay with closed eyes, and the faithful woman backed tiptoeing out. Downstairs in the old sitting-room Stephen anxiously waited her return.

"She was sleepin' an' I didn't wake her up," said

Melissa. "I'm worried to death about her. She didn't know how tired she was, nor I didn't either."

The man paced the floor.

"Melissa," said he, stopping suddenly before her, "I'm going to ask her this very day to be my wife."

He looked at her searchingly, as if she could in some way foretell his destiny. But she dropped into a chair, and throwing her apron over her head began to cry like a baby.

"What is it? Tell me, Melissa," demanded Stephen. "Is she so very sick?"

"Oh, I don't know," sobbed the woman. "Only—I was afraid you—you felt different toward her."

"Oh!" Stephen's face cleared a little. "Why, of course I don't. I couldn't."

The woman still sobbed.

"Melissa, don't you think there's hope for me?"

"I don't know. I used to think so, an' sometimes I think so now, an' then again I don't. You'll have to find out by askin', same's anybody else."

"But don't you think she cares for me a little?" insisted he.

"She'll die if she don't—that's what I think," blurted out Melissa. Then she choked again and beat a precipitate retreat to the kitchen, where she comforted herself by "doin' up" the breakfast dishes for Mrs. Daly.

Stephen sat down and took up a paper, but he could not read. Just this way, he remembered, he had sat waiting for her three years before — three years almost to a day! Just this way he had listened for her step on the stair. He was desperately impatient. He had waited years, but now he chafed at minutes.

If — if — Ah! That was her step now — on the stairs. How light it was—stealthy! And that was the front door softly opening. Why, where was she going?

Mary had risen and tried wearily to dress. The walls of the room seemed closing in upon her like the relentlessly lowering ceiling of an ingenious chamber of torture she had read about once when a child. Oh, she was smothering! She must have air—must get out! Where was the dear old rippling brook? Where were the level branching beeches—the pines with their soothing murmurs? She must get to them—soon.

She hastily wrote a little note, so that Melissa if she came again would not be anxious, pinned a broad-brimmed hat over her hair and crept downstairs. Once out of the rarely used front door, she knew there was little risk of being seen. She walked rapidly—she almost ran. She turned aside toward the woods. Here was the cool brook, still purling down, its pebbles at the bottom glinting in the sunshine refracted from them at many crossing angles. She stooped to wet her hands and face, but she did not stop. She reached the pines, standing tall and calm, their million pitying little tufts looking down at her and moving in the light wind with a noise like low breathing. She cast herself down on the brown carpet. An hour she lay thus—two hours. A little mottled snake wriggled near and lifted its head to gaze at her curiously. She shuddered, thinking of Le Cygne. Why, oh, why had he ever been permitted to trail his slime over her life? And yet—but for that fearful experience she would never have met Vinnie—nor Sister—and the school would never have been. God had overruled it after all. It was a reason, even if a hard one—and

God was good. What was the pain of one woman's soul, prolonged though it be through a thousand life-times, compared with the welfare of these dear girls? The joy of self-sacrifice suddenly glowed over her. Yes, she would live on—she would bear her iron cross. Only she must have time—just a little time! Happiness? Was happiness essential to life? No, no! Calm, straight, onward living—a quiet meeting and doing of duty—that was the only essential.

The snake had long ago wriggled away, and in her new strength Mary rose to return. But as she stood leaning against a tree trunk a moment, for a little prayer, she thought she heard her own name called softly. It sounded like Stephen's voice, and it seemed to her overwrought fancy to come from another world. Stephen! He was a thousand miles away.

But still she stood listening with throbbing heart and hushed breath. Again the call came.

"Mary! Mary!"

She turned and saw Stephen. He came straight to her standing pale and wide-eyed by the tree.

"Did I frighten you, Mary? I hoped you would know my voice."

"I thought—I thought you were in Chicago," said Mary, bewildered.

"I came on this morning. Melissa telegraphed me —I had told her to do so. Then when I heard you leave the house I came after you — forgive me, but we were so anxious about you. I didn't speak before because I hoped you would sleep. I knew that would be the best thing for you."

"It was very kind of you," faltered Mary. "When did you leave Chicago?"

"Yesterday morning. Yes, they're all well. Miss St. John sent her love and told me to tell you not to worry. She's a beautiful woman!"—with emphasis.

"Yes, indeed!" replied Mary faintly.

"Now we'll find a nice cozy seat—let me move this stone so you will have a rest for your back. There! You see I am going to keep you a long time—I have something to tell you."

Mary sat down—her knees were shaking under her. It was his engagement, of course.

"Will not Melissa be expecting us back?" said she, weakly.

"No, I told her we might be gone till afternoon."

He tugged away at a bulging pocket and brought out a package of crackers badly crushed.

"She thought we might get hungry and insisted that I take these. I wouldn't give her time to put up a lunch—she wanted me to wait for sandwiches and napkins," in a tone of half fearful comicality that brought a smile to Mary's lips in spite of herself.

"There!" said Stephen, triumphantly squeezing the suffering crackers back into his pocket. The faint smile had put heart into him. "Now—are you quite comfortable?"

"Yes," said Mary, mechanically. She braced herself for his story, clasping her hands tightly on her lap. She was smiling bravely, but her face was very pale, the long lashes sweeping down into the purple shadows under her eyes.

"Mary—" said he.

In the freedom of the old times he would have taken one of the little hands. Now he dared not touch them. What did that firm clenching mean?

"Mary!—" His voice deepened and thickened a little. His brows were drawn into heavy furrows. "Mary, you must know what I am going to say."

"Yes, I know!" She spoke from ashy lips, but she looked straight at him, still smiling. "I congratulate you most heartily."

Stephen paused in bewilderment, but only for a moment.

"I don't know what you mean," he said, "but I can't stop to find out just now. You must let me say what I have in my heart—now at last. Mary, I love you—love you—love you! For years I have loved you with all my heart. I was strangely drawn to you the first time I ever saw you—when you were a little girl—the time those fiends were snow-balling you. Your little blue mitten—I have it yet."

He paused with a shivering pang as he recalled the pressure of the little form against his breast—the clasp of the round arms around his neck. And the kisses!

But Mary stared at him, her great eyes black with bewilderment. What could it mean? Then she understood.

"Oh, Stephen, don't!" she cried with a gesture piteous in its pleading. "Give—give me—wait a little while!"

She dropped back against the stones and the man waited. She panted for breath, almost suffocated with choking joy for a moment. Then—agony! But she must not fail now. She was prepared. In the old days when she had feared this, she had thought out many times just what she would say. She tried to say it, but the voice would not come.

"Mary," said Stephen at last, "may I speak now?

I must go on—I will. I think I loved you when you were a child, but for four years now—since that first beautiful summer—I know that you have had all my heart."

There was no sound from the motionless figure.

"Mary, have you no word for me?"

Still silence.

"Perhaps I should explain why I did not speak that first summer. I did try once or twice. But I saw you were a child, your womanly nature still unawakened, and I feared to lose you. So I went to Germany—I thought my letters would hold you till I came back. I can never, never forgive myself, for if I had spoken then, or at least if I had stayed and watched over you, I might—"

Mary shook her head, protesting.

"Then when you were at the Deaconess Home the words were on my lips time and time again. But I feared to still further alarm and confuse you. I did not want to take advantage of your weakness. I wished you to be well and strong, and to know your own heart. And for these three years you know why I have not spoken—you have not permitted me to speak. But now the school is well established and Sister could surely carry it on—or you could still give it much of your time. Mary, do speak to me. I am a man waiting between life and death. Can you give me no word of hope? I love you, Mary. I want to make you my wife."

"I am very, very sorry," said the girl at last, with dry mouth. Her voice had a peculiar shrillness in it that he had never noticed before. It chilled him. "And I thank you for the great honor you have done

me, but it can never be. I would have stopped it if I could." She spoke like one reciting a lesson that had been learned by heart.

A pee-wee suddenly piped his flutelike call of heart-breaking sweetness in the tree above them. Far off an answer came, faint, clear. They both heard it—they remembered it afterward. The light breeze had died away, and the cool woods were very still.

"Mary," said Stephen, and his voice, too, was changed and choked. "There is one thing I must know. I am not urging you—if with all our long and close association you do not care for me I quite understand that my case is hopeless. But there are other things. Is it because—Mary—"

But he could not bring himself to speak of it—her sad past. He began again.

"Mary, I must know—must have an answer to one question. I can be satisfied with nothing less. Do you not love me?"

"I think we had not better talk further on the subject, Stephen. I want to go home. I want you to believe me when I say that it can never be. I would rather have died than give you pain, but it can never be."

She rose, hard, dry-eyed, a bright spot in either cheek.

"Mary, I beg—I demand an answer to my question. If you really want me to go, you have but to say one word—"

"It can never be," said Mary, again. She tried to walk away, her arms falling down limp. The limit of utmost endurance was not far away.

Stephen caught her by her cold hands.

"No, Mary, I will not let you go till you answer my question. I have a right—"

"Oh, I know you have the right—"

He was cut to the heart.

"Mary, you know I did not mean that. All I did for you that dreadful time was done most freely—for my own comfort more than for yours. But any man who offers a woman the true love of his heart has a right at least to know if his love be returned. It was that I meant. I claim this right. Mary, answer me this one question—you must. Look at me, Mary. Do you not love me?"

The trees began to whirl before the girl's eyes. The pee-wee's call above her seemed far away.

"I wish I could sit down," said she piteously.

Stephen led her back to the seat. Then he waited. Her hands were clenched again, the blood congested about the places where the ends of the fingers pressed hard into the delicate flesh.

Finally she spoke, still in that shrill voice and with eyes averted.

"It makes little difference, I think, and it will only cause more pain to discuss it since there is an insurmountable barrier in the way."

Stephen's hopes fell. What could it be, this "insurmountable barrier"? Was there still some mysterious episode of that sad year that he did not know?

"What is it?" he demanded, with a kind of fierce desperation. "I think I have a right—no, no! I didn't mean to say that. But won't you tell me, Mary? I beg you to tell me."

"You know my decision, and it will never change."

She spoke with a mechanical intonation, more

depressing than emotion. Her face was ghastly. Stephen looking at her almost forgot his love in an overmastering rush of pity.

"But—but — maybe I've no right to say this either, but—Mary you're so alone. And you're not well! Oh, my dear, give me the right to care for you—to try to make you happy."

"I am very well," said Mary. "And you forget—I have Melissa. Oh, I want to go to Melissa!"

Her voice rose to a wailing cry.

Stephen could not resist her. He helped her to her feet without a word, and putting her hand on his arm —for she was staggering—they started homeward. She had conquered. They passed out from the deep shade of the pines into the beech woods. They walked over the brown, matted leaves, Stephen holding aside the low branches. The pee-wee's call died away. Then all unexpectedly they came out into the dandelion dell. Here was the rock bench where four years before they had sat and watched the flower and bee. Walking dumbly along, their keenly strained senses recognized the place—Stephen first, with a little start, then Mary. Ah, there was a wide mass of sprawling dandelion leaves and a few great, sunshine-seeking flower heads, stretching up on their long stems. Then, mysteriously, a subtle chain of memory wove itself through Stephen's mind, flashing out one bright link only: It was here that he first began to ask himself, "Will she ever love me?"

He stopped suddenly, confronting her. His eyes gleamed into her startled face.

"Mary," he cried, gripping her by the arms, "do you love me?"

The girl threw up her hands with a dumb petition for mercy.

"Oh, Stephen!" she cried, "you hurt me! I cannot bear any more!"

"You do — you do, Mary. You cannot — you dare not deny it. Why do you torture me this way?"

Mary's lips quivered, and under his eager eyes she gave way at last. She drew away against a tree, covered her face with her hands and sobbed aloud. His heart seemed breaking over her, but he dared not touch her again.

"Mary, is it—I must speak of it—is it because of your past?"

She did not move. She could not deny nor longer evade it. The man at her side read her silence, and his heart leaped up within him in a fierce joy. Yet when he spoke it was with the gentleness of a woman. He went over the old arguments, acquitting her of all blame.

"I see it, Stephen. I was not to blame—at least not so much as I used to think—"

"Not at all! It was simply a misfortune."

"Call it misfortune then. But it was a misfortune that must prevent me from marrying any man—most of all you! You have been so kind to me! I can't drag you down—there's Miss St. John—" incoherently.

"Miss St. John? I told her a month ago—I was so anxious about you. But you are the woman I love, Mary. There is but one way you can drag me down. It is to send me away from you. I am thirty-two years old, Mary, past the time when men usually fall in love. In my whole life I never met any other woman who entered at all into my heart. But you—

you! The very thought of you satisfies me—gives me unspeakable joy. For four years you have been the star of my life. Every morning as I wakened my first thought has been of you. Every evening I have gone to sleep holding you close in my heart. Every day of the weary months that I was looking for you, you grew dearer to me. Every day of these three years of waiting I have admired and loved you more. I could not have endured the long silence only that I have been near you, and—I have looked forward to this day. And now—do you think I can ever love any other woman? I never, never can! If you send me away I go a crushed and broken man."

"Oh, no, no," faltered Mary behind her sheltering hands.

"Yes," persisted Stephen. "I mean exactly what I say. Are you going to let that old trouble which I thought had been forgotten—"

"Forgotten? Oh, Stephen, I have never forgotten it one moment of my life!"

He looked at her almost despairingly. But he would not give up. Then a thought came.

"Mary, Mary! What would you think of me if I loved a woman and she loved me, but I would not marry her because of this scar on my face? Can you conceive of greater folly? Are you going to do me this great injury—this frightful injustice—because—"

"Oh, Stephen! It was to save you—for your sake—that I—"

"But, Mary, does God mean nothing by love?"

There was a moment's silence. Then Mary suddenly turned toward Stephen and took one little step. There was no need for a second.

"If I can only make you happy, little Wood-violet!"

"Happy? I *am* happy, Stephen. Love—love like this!—I never loved before. My mother had a vision of Heaven once—just before she died. But I have—I have love!"

"Love is God," said Stephen. "For God is Love. His love is the great, glorious, heavenly stream—ours is the tiny rill. But it is all—Love! And all God!"

* * * * * * * * *

They sat on the old rock bench too happy for words. A red squirrel dashing along his tree highway suddenly discovered them, and flashed out on a limb nearby, excitedly chattering his displeasure. A breath of the old woods instinct came upon the two and they sat motionless, watching the little creature's antics. Suddenly he jerked himself erect and clapped his small paw affectedly over his wildly palpitating little heart. In the old happy days the watchers had often seen squirrels take this attitude, but now it became to them an exquisite burlesque, and they laughed till the old woods rang.

"Mary, why, Mary!" cried Stephen, as a sudden thought flashed over him. "I never heard you laugh like that before! Mary, my heart's love, give me a little time and I'll make you forget—" He hesitated.

"Why!—I believe I have already forgotten it, Stephen—all my past! I am like one newborn into the world! I am just beginning to live!"

THE END

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